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ITALY:

GENERAL VIEWS

OF

ITS HISTORY AND LITERATURE

IN REFERENCE TO

ITS PRESENT STATE.

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BY L. MARIOTTI.

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DEDICATED

TO THE

RIGHT HONOURABLE LIEUTENANT-GENERAL

JOHN, LORD BURGHERSH, K.C.B.

ETC., ETC., ETC.

PREFACE.

THE following essay was meant at first as a course of Lectures, and was delivered before a private audience in Boston. A few chapters of it subsequently appeared in some of the most distinguished metropolitan periodicals. But by far the largest part lay still inedited; and even what had already been published, has, in this edition, undergone considerable alterations.

The vastness of the subject, and the small size of these volumes, may suggest the idea, that this is intended as a compendiary or elementary work. Such was not, however, the author's mind. This essay is only intended to

give general considerations on a subject generally well known; and it must necessarily presuppose a certain degree of information on the part of the reader.

The writer of these volumes is fully aware how imperfectly he has mastered the difficulties of the English language. It would, of course, have been easy to have had his work revised by a native of this country, but he apprehended lest his style might have lost in spontaneousness what it gained in correctness and accuracy.

April 15, 1841.

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ITALY.

GENERAL VIEWS ON ITS HISTORY, LITERATURE, &c.

INTRODUCTION.

Down in a southern clime, amidst the silent waves of a tideless sea, there lies a weary land, whose life is only in the past and the future. It is my purpose to interrogate the monuments of her past, to throw some light on the secrets of her future.

For Italy has been of late the favourite haunt of idle strangers, who have judged in haste and prejudice, who have studied things, not men; who have found no nation in Italy, but the dust of nations. An Italian may perhaps be expected to entertain different ideas. He who has looked to his country with the veneration of a son and the enthusiasm of a lover, who has mused on her ruins and shrines, and mingled with the

crowds of her cities, may perhaps have known enough of Italy to be proud of her memories, and to live on her hopes.

Thus, when endeavouring to engage public attention on so trite a theme as the history and literature of Italy, it is with the hope that an old subject may be presented under new points of view; that from a rapid and general survey of Italy as she has been, may naturally result some illustrations of what she is, and some conjectures as to what she is to be.

The present essay aims principally to protest against the sentence of those cold reasoners, who, by disheartening theories anticipating the decrees of Providence, have pronounced, "It is over for ever with Italy;" for, however hard the hand of the Eternal may now weigh on that country, it can never enter into his design utterly to erase from the list of nations that one, which has been repeatedly charged with the mission of rescuing the human families from the errors and superstitions of the ages of darkness.

Italy has long been made in England the theme for poesy and romance. Her history and literature have given rise to valuable productions of a more serious mood. But foreign writers are apt to deal too rashly against a

country which enjoys not even the privilege of pleading her cause by the organ of the press. Let then such of her sons be heard as misfortune has placed beyond reach of their censure at home; and be this the boast of old England, that she has opened the lists, and granted fair play to the oppressed of all countries, wherein to meet their enemies on neutral ground at equal weapons, until the day dawn when their contest of life and death shall be fought on a different field, with arms of a different nature.

Italy, in modern civilisation the eldest of countries, exhibits in her outward aspect the long ravages of age. Ruins of forums and mausoleums, arches of bridges and aqueducts, gothic castles and temples, nunneries, dungeons, Madonnas and Venuses, the wrecks of all worships and governments, all crushed in a common heap, mouldering in a general dissolution. Such is old Italy. But among those ruins a few warm, confiding hearts may be seen, impatient of that lingering decay, actively though rather indiscriminately hastening the work of time, trampling those remains with disdain, to level them to the ground, a basis for new edifices; young believers, firm in the opinion of an approaching redemption, sanguine

thinkers exulting in the eternal reproduction of all things. Such is young Italy, the elements of Italy in ages to come.

It is not difficult for a candid observer to recognise in that country an age of transition. Such is, in fact, the condition of all Europe; but in other countries it is a question of democracy or aristocracy, of reforms and constitutions; in Italy it is a question of existence. The revolution of Italy must be a total subversion of all social orders; it is not to be effected by sects or conspiracies, not by fortuitous incidents of wars, or changes of dynasties; it must arise from the recasting of the individual and national character, from the enlightened resentment of masses, from the sympathy of an immense compact population, from the resources of a rich soil, from the seeds sown by a liberal, refined civilisation, developed in several unsuccessful attempts, and strengthened by insane persecutions.

Few countries have, in the course of the last fifty years—we mean the age of Napoleon—undergone a more total revolution than Italy. Her political divisions and boundaries are indeed nearly the same, with the exception, perhaps, of Venice and Genoa, the last leaves hanging on a withered branch, which were doomed to

drop at the first blast of November; but all the notions, the morals, the passions, the prejudices and superstitions, the popular festivals and spectacles have either been entirely abolished, or changed in their nature and tendency, or have given place to others of an entirely opposite character.

From the days of Charles V. to the end of the last century, Italy had undergone a rapid, yet imperceptible decline: her sky smiled as brightly as ever, her climate was as mild. A privileged land, removed from all cares of political existence, she went on with dances and music, happy in her ignorance, sleeping in the intoxication of incessant prosperity. Used to the scourges of invasion, passive in all rivalries springing up among her neighbours, schooled to suffer and to forget, she consoled herself for the evils inflicted by foreigners, with the old saying, that her land was destined to be the tomb of her conquerors. The first spring shower washed away the blood with which the invaders had stained the green enamel of her plains; the first harvest, luxuriant from a soil enriched by French and German corpses, made up for the dearth occasioned by the waste of a hungry soldiery; and the sons of the south took up again their guitars, wiped away their

tears, and sang anew, like a cloud of birds when the tempest is over.

Such were not the consequences of the late wars; her neighbours were envious of that uninterrupted enjoyment; the serpent intruded himself into the Eden of Europe. The French philosophers persuaded the Italians they were too happy, and they envied the tempests of France, as if tired of happiness.

The French, wanting aid from every quarter, hailed the awakening of Italy. They gave her a standard; they girt her sons with the weapons of war; they seated them in senates and parliaments. They dusted the iron crown of the Lombards, and placed it on the brow of one of her islanders. The Italians started up; they believed, they followed, they fought. Deceived by the French, they turned to the Austrians—betrayed by the Austrians, they came back to the French. There ensued a series of deception and perfidy, of blind confidence and disappointment; and when the Italians, weary, dejected, and ravaged, lay down abandoned to their bitter reflections, an awful truth shone in its full evidence, the only price for torrents of blood—that beyond the Alps they had nothing but enemies. The reaction was long and severe. To those few years of

raving intoxication, lethargy succeeded, and nothingness. The sword was taken from the side of the brave, the lips of the wise were closed; all was settled, and silenced, and fettered but thought.

Thought remained anxious, sleepless, rebellious; with a grim, severe monitor behind—Memory; and a rosy syren before—Hope, always within its reach, always receding from its embrace; and it sat a tyrant of the soul, preyed upon the heart of the young, of the brave, of the lovely, choosing its victims with the cruel sagacity of the vampire, and it strewed their couches with thorns, and sprinkled their feasts with poison, and snatched from their hands the cup of pleasure.

"Italians!" was the cry, "remember what you have been, what you are, what you must be. Is it thus, on the dust of heroes, is it in the fairest of lands, that you drag on days of abjectness? Will you never afford a better spectacle to the nations than masquerades and processions of monks? Will you never go out among strangers, except as fiddlers and limners? England and France are subduing deserts and oceans; Germany flourishes in science and letters. The sons of the North are snatching from your hands the sceptre of

the arts. What is to become of Italy? Shall her name be buried under these ruins, to which you cling with the fondness of a fallen noble, prouder of the escutcheon, and of the portraits of his ancestors, in proportion as he degenerates from them? Shall it be said of her sons that they have made their own destiny, and they groan under a yoke they have merited?"

Such are the bitter chagrins to which the Italians have been left, from the ephemeral excitement arising from the revolutionary ideas of the late convulsions of Europe. The nation at large has assumed a serious and sullen countenance. The revels of the carnivals have lost their attraction; that slow and silent disease, that atrabilarious frenzy—politics, pervades all ranks, exhibiting a striking contrast with the radiant and harmonious gaiety of heaven and earth. Morals gain by this melancholy mood, and studies come off conquerors over all obstacles raised against them.

Unfortunately the rulers have not been capable of justly appreciating the new ideas and wants of the age. Instead of encouraging these awakening energies, and directing them to noble pursuits, they have been alarmed at the prevailing restlessness of mind; they have apprehended in it the germs of social dissolu-

tion. They have declared war to the movement, but the movement is dragging and involving them in spite of themselves. They have shed blood lavishly, they have raised an insurmountable barrier against all possible reconciliation. Now both parties have recognised and counted each other. They lie in presence, with their arms by their side, waiting for the signal of combat.

Meanwhile the land is sterile of events; all is mute and sad, as in the calm that precedes the storm. Every one recognises an age of transition, of preparation. Every one feels that Italy has no longer any lower degree of dejection to sink into; that, according to the rules of Providence, she has a right to look to the future for brighter days; that all her sons are natural brothers and allies, that their enemy is the same, and their cause one; that God was pleased to associate them in common sufferings, that they might aspire to a common redemption.

Literature, as well as commerce, industry, and all the fine arts, except music, are unproductive. All is paralysed by the great crisis that the clemency of Heaven seems to be slowly maturing. Italian literature in our days is one of constraint and discontent, of

transition and expectation, reluctant and murmuring, stifled and tortured. A proud enthusiasm has given a strange relish for silence and melancholy. The Italian bards rend the chords of their harps, shaking their heads with a sullen disdain. "No," they exclaim, "we shall not sing the lays of our land for the gratification of strangers; we shall not soothe with our verses the toils of bondmen. Let the brightness of our skies be clouded; let the fire be quenched in the eyes of the daughters of Italy; the pure enjoyment of the treasures of nature are the exclusive possession of noble souls; the smiles of beauty should be the sacred reward for high deeds; the songs of the troubadour are reserved for the delight of the brave, that dare to rival his heroes." The voice of the Italian bards is mute; they seek the solitude of their groves, the stillness of their ruins, refusing utterance to their sorrows, and obstinately feeding upon them; or they carry their chagrin beyond mountains and seas, roaming from land to land, among strangers who cannot understand them, to pine away slowly and die, like exotic plants, drinking a scanty ray through the panes of a hot-house, drooping their heads on their consumptive stems, and yielding life without struggle or regret.

But letters in Italy are undergoing the same silent and rapid revolution that we have noticed in politics. In literature also there is an old and a young Italy; there are the ideas of the old social world, and the wants of the new; there are classics and romantics.

That spirit of scholastic erudition which insinuated itself into Italian literature, even from its primitive era, had by degrees deprived it of all influence on the progress of society. Men of letters, mustered up in their academical ranks, abstracted themselves from life and lived in the past. Hence, by a strange anomaly, literature had remained behind the age, and foregone its true mission. It had become a luxury, a privilege. It slackened in proportion with all national energy, and either languished in the vain contemplative speculations of the solitary scholar, or was turned by the wily tyrant into an instrument of corruption and connivance. The prince threw gold at the feet of the bard, and the bard stooped to gather it. Art became a trade; academies were opened, and sent forth rhymesmiths by the score. Pedantry dictated its laws uncontrolled; the bed of Procrustes was produced, and all capacities were stretched or mutilated, according to the academical pattern.

This narrow-minded classicism, this retrospective literature, had reached its highest pitch of success towards the close of the last century. It taught that the Greeks and Latins, issuing more freshly from the hands of nature, free from all mixture, free from all specious refinements of an artificial culture, had contemplated and painted nature in her native innocence and graces, smiling with the roses, fragrant with the perfumes of the happy climes of the East; that an instinctive taste for order, proportion, and symmetry, for justness and measure, had early, and, as it were, instinctively, determined for them the confines of the beautiful, and naturally dictated the rules of unity for their poems and dramas, with the same judgment that had presided over the construction of their temples and theatres.

It taught that Italy was by birthright a classic land, a vast museum of classic remains and memorials; that her children had inherited that exquisite organization, and that sober imagination, by which their fathers had chosen to restrain themselves within certain limits, had combined union with vastness and variety, and raised edifices, which are still braving the redoubled efforts of time and man; that the imagination of the northern nations is gloomy,

their traditions dark and dreary, like the aspect of their forests; their fancies heavy and dull, like the frown of their sky; that in subjects derived from modern history there is too much matter-of-fact prosaic notoriety, ever to afford room for poetical fictions; that the speculative sciences have despoiled the modern world of its most charming illusions; that poetry, like painting, loves to contemplate objects fading in the distance, and involved in a mysterious twilight.

It was added, with a strange mixture of hypocrisy and cowardice, that the Christian religion is too awful a subject, and modern patriotism too delicate, to be prostituted to poetical dreams, to become an object of scoffing profanation, or a source of revolutionary effervescence.

On the other hand, the new school—it matters not whether it be called romantic or independent—has proclaimed that literature must spring from life, and take the lead in the progress of society; that it must belong to the age and nation for which it is produced; that it must divine the spirit of the times, and go before it; that religion is poetry, and can derive more evidence from the warmest inspirations than from the most subtle arguments; that among

the ancients the type of the beautiful had something too ideal, too abstract, too general; that their poetry was etching, chiselling, not painting; that their notions of symmetry and harmony, their laws of the three unities, depended on local circumstances—on the measure of their rhythm, on the shape of their stage; but that order prescribes no scale of dimensions, that unity is not incompatible with immensity, nay, that immensity is the comprehension of all unities; that the ancients spoke to the imagination or to the senses, not to the heart; that their feelings had too much of earth, while our affections have been sanctified and ennobled by the influence of a pure religion and the progressive refinement of manners; that the Pagan sought all enjoyment in this world, while the Christian places all his expectations beyond it; that, independent of all reasonings, every age must be represented by its own literature; that we may take advantage of the inheritance of past ages, since it has been providentially preserved, but we must have our own productions, and build in our turn for posterity.

These theories, radiant with the light of truth, flattering the revolutionary mood which agitates the mind in Italy, have visibly prevailed

over the most active part of the population, the young: and as the jealous governments, by their vandalic reforms of the universities, and by the censure of the press, are waging an obstinate war against Romanticism, it ensues that there is no literature in Italy; and never will there be any until letters assume their place in society, and a new independent literature arise, the literature of action and life.

Now it is precisely in this unsettled state of ephemeral repose, in this kind of inter-act between the past and the future state of things, in this epoch of annihilation and sterility, that it appears most opportune to study the moral, political, and literary state of Italy in bygone ages.

The history of nations is naturally divided into so many distinct epochs; the same or analogous revolutions take place in regular periods, and their history is never so well studied as during those intervals of silence and torpor during which the exhausted nation supplies its empty veins with new blood, and acquires strength for new action; as the geologist, who would explore the crater of a volcano, must wait for an interval in which the mountain lies still and cold, as if spent by the last eruption, and preparing in silence and darkness the glowing materials for the new one.

There is, let me repeat it, there is no present in Italy. She has arrived at the end of a weary day, and rests from her toils and sufferings: to-morrow she will awake a different being, and pursue a new, perhaps an opposite course. Let those who wish to foretell her new destinies study her past vicissitudes. Let our inquiries on the ages of Dante, Michael Angelo, and Galileo, teach us what is to be expected of their descendants; for there is, even in the most distant and disparate events, an admirable chain of causes and effects, some links of which it is not always impossible even for human shortsightedness to trace.

There are valuable works published in all languages on the history and literature of Italy. But both subjects have become of late a new study. The republic of letters has been formed into a vast association, which tends to bring all branches of learning under one common point of view. In ancient times each science stood by itself; they were placed by the side of each other, without link of connection, without mutual relation to each other.

But, in our days, he who knows any thing must know every thing. Studies have taken an encyclopedical turn. We reduce each science to a system, and refer all sciences to a general

system. We compress the huge folios of our fathers within the narrow compass of a manual, and we add to the manual an index that can spare us the trouble of going through it. This is evidently the result of a vital change in the general turn of thought. Men and things diminish and fade in the distance of time as well as of space. The importance that we attach to contemporaneous events and productions renders us blind as to their probable value in the eyes of posterity.

This was especially the case in the stagnating age that preceded the French revolution. The general culture and refinement of that epoch had a natural tendency to treasure up memorials and books with indiscriminate diligence. The spirit of pedantry, bringing all minds to a common level, encouraged the efforts of mediocrity, and the gilded chariot of fame was turned into a mercenary omnibus, taking up passengers at every turning of the road.

The present generation, the posterity of the age of Napoleon, engaged in hard struggles of vital importance have learned how to economise time and labour. History, in our days, intimately associated with philosophy, only studies the causes and effects of the principal events

that affect the general course of social progress, and lets details fall into their relative insignificance. Literature contemplates the works of those few sovereign minds that gave the writings of their age and country characteristical features, and turns with a look of contempt from the servile crowd of imitators. It hushes the mocking-birds, to let the nightingales be heard alone. Out of a whole library, modern criticism selects only a few volumes; out of a firmament crowded with planets and satellites, it numbers only twenty or thirty stars of the first magnitude.

Moreover, the noble efforts of some illustrious critics, especially German, have shown that the history of literature can be turned to profitable purposes only if considered as connected with the times in which it flourished, and with the political events that exerted a most powerful influence on its progress or decline, without which such works would be merely lists of names, titles, and dates, void of interest and salutary instruction.

Let me be understood that I am not writing the history of Italy or of her literature; my object is only to give some considerations on both subjects, as essentially connected together; to study the sources of Italian greatness in the

middle and modern ages, and of its gradual downfall, endeavouring to refer all that is said of the past as a lesson for the present and future.

It would be needless to dwell long on the ever new and ever increasing importance of the study of this old subject. The history of Italy, from the extinction of the Roman empire to the fall of Napoleon, offers the advantage of a complete drama, which we are enabled to embrace at a single glance. The other nations of Europe are rapidly advancing in their career. Italy has stopped at the end of her long evolution, and when she starts once more it will be on a different orbit.

The history and the literature of Italy, from the earliest revival of civilisation in the middle ages down to the age of Leo X., can be fairly considered as the history of the progress of the human mind in all the Christian world. The seeds of civil and religious liberty were first developed on Italian soil; all branches of industry and commerce, of letters and arts, had reached their meridian splendour in that country two long centuries ere a faint twilight began to break through the darkness that reigned on the other side of the Alps. True, if Italy has sown, others have reaped—what Italy only began, other nations under better

auspices, are now happily accomplishing. True, after that first impulse, her activity has gradually slackened, and she has now—we hear it so frequently repeated that we must have learned it by heart—she has now been left far behind the hindmost of her neighbours.

Still a time has been when she was ruler and mistress, and to that time other nations must look back, if they wish to know their own history. They cannot well understand their own moral and civil institutions without remounting to their sources; they cannot value the productions of genius in their own countries, without knowing the full extent of their debt towards that country where genius winged its first flight.

There are many prejudices extant in Europe against Italy, against the ignorance, the corruption, the demoralisation of her inhabitants; but it is also as generally acknowledged that Italians improve on a closer acquaintance, and I know of no example of a foreigner who, after having studied the history and literature of Italy, has not changed his unkind feelings into the warmest admiration and sympathy.

It is not, after mature examination, difficult to perceive how the subject presents itself under a natural division, how the grand chain of

events that crowded upon each other in that formerly so busy country, how the annals of so many republics and states, and it may be said, of so many nations, living on the same land and speaking one language, can, however, be reduced to a rational system, according as these infinite divisions and subdivisions offer some general points for analytical survey. Abandoning, therefore, the most approved plans hitherto followed in all works on the subject, I shall attempt to divide the history and literature of Italy into five distinct eras.

I. The first will embrace the middle ages, or the age of darkness. This epoch will comprehend the history of the Italian nations from the time when they sprang vigorously forth from the mixture of the northern and eastern invaders with the remains of the Roman world: it will go back to the sources of modern institutions, manners, and feelings, such as they arose from the contact of the rude but active temper of the conquerors with the corrupted but enlightened manners of the conquered: it will examine the influence exerted upon both by a new religion, which came to soothe, to level, to heal; and, sketching the course of events, it will disclose by what providential magistery the new seeds of liberty and inde-

pendence were gradually developed—how, after long struggles between Goths and Greeks, between Lombards and Franks, after long domestic quarrels between popes and emperors, between kings and vassals, tending to disgrace equally the monarchical, the feudal, and the papal system, the popular element was roused from silence in the ardent Lombard and Tuscan cities,—that element which a long age of usurpation seemed to have effaced from the body politic, and erased from the memory of mankind; it will relate how the ancient seeds of Greek and Roman lore, buried under the barbaric alluvions, began slowly to germinate in the theological and philosophical universities instituted by Charlemagne and his successors; it will give a short account of the semi-barbarous writings of the fathers of the church, of the monkish chronicles of the middle ages, and of the more active and living pursuits of the doctors of law in the universities of the newly-emancipated republics; it will watch the rise and progress of the modern Italian language, making its way with difficulty through the obstacles that a narrow-minded pedantry raised against it, announcing that the present was to bid adieu to the past, and that a new nation was formed. It will examine what influence

the glowing poetry of the Arabians and Provençals, and the warlike songs and gloomy superstitions of the Germans and Normans, may have exerted on the future start of Italian genius, and what share the French trouvères and troubadours have a right to claim in the glory of Petrarch and Ariosto.

From such a long course of events, and from so many heterogeneous elements, Nature proceeded to the formation of the age of Dante.

II. The second epoch in the age of liberty, embraces the glories of the Italian republics from the first sanctioning of the independence of the Lombard cities at the peace of Constance in 1183, down to the last agony of liberty in Florence under the repeated assaults of papal perfidy and imperial violence in 1530. This is the epoch the great history of Sismondi has illustrated. It is an age of strife and movement, of energy and enthusiasm, of blindness and ferocity. A youthful nation, infatuated with the consciousness of its own vigour, restless, credulous, discordant, exhausts its forces to its own destruction. Liberty is no sooner secured than abused. Feudal and democratic elements, Guelphs and Ghibelines, popes and anti-popes, crusades and heresies, feuds between neighbouring cities,

factions within the walls of the same city, turn the whole country into a vast field of battle. Meanwhile a confused mass of Roman and barbaric institutions, the collision of a hundred undefined and contradictory rights and privileges, hurry on the social order to its final dissolution, until at length every one of those inconsiderate republics, at different intervals, falls a prey to the tyrant it had nourished in its bosom. But the spirit of liberty breathed over the land—the energies of those disorderly states increased and redoubled in these obstinate struggles. Venice, Genoa, and Pisa, divided the empire of the seas. The manufactures of Milan and Florence supplied all Europe. Italian fleets and chivalry retreated the last of all from Palestine; Italian squadrons routed the Saracens in Sicily, Sardinia, and Spain, and letters and arts shone with so intense a lustre that no length of time will ever eclipse it.

From the silence of the cloisters where it lay confined, a sterile privilege of sickly old men, the new literature started into life, wild and fiery as the stormy age which it was called to enlighten; a blessed age, when the heart of the writer was glowing, and the hand trembling with the agitation of public life, when the scholar was at once a citizen, a warrior, a magistrate,

when genius moved unconfined in its orbit, swayed by no power but the feeling of the importance and dignity of its mission. This was the literature of the age of Dante. It embraced the whole of the fourteenth century, but it descended also partially through the following epochs, wherever a faint breath of liberty was found to foster it; it developed itself afresh during the last struggles of Florence, in the pages of Machiavelli and Varchi; it animated the canvas of Leonardo and the marble of Michael Angelo; it led, in different pursuits, the last Italian heroes, Colonna, Strozzi, Doria, and Dandolo, to their daring exploits; and the Italian navigators, Columbus, Amerigo, and the Cabots, to their venturous cruises.

III. The third period, the age of domestic tyranny, the age of the Este and the Medici, which, to adopt the common phrase, we shall call "the age of splendour," commenced at the court of the first Cosmo and his grandson Lorenzo dei Medici, and embraced those golden ages of Leo X., of the first and second Alphonso of Ferrara, down to the last patronage granted to literature by the Dukes of Savoy, by the patrician aristocracy at Venice, and at Rome in the days of Queen Christina of Sweden. From their raging anarchy the Lombard and Tuscan

republics had passed under a yoke of terror and blood; the usurpers of their liberties, for the most part monsters in human shape, the annals of whose dominion history blushes to relate, still obeying the public taste for letters and arts, and the spirit of grandeur and liberality, which they inherited from the republics, and which they turned into one of the most efficient instruments of tyranny, they spread over their age a dazzling lustre, which, as it then blinded the people to their true interests, and reconciled them to their gilded chains, so it misleads even now, not unfrequently, the judgment of posterity.

Literature now abode in the courts of Augustus and Mecænas. The charms of poetry and eloquence learned to dress flattery in all the pomp of a courtly garb. It was an age of theatres and academies, of refinement and luxury, of ebriety and extravagance.

As the abuse of liberty had led the Italian republics to an immature death, so the abuse of learning had, at the beginning of this period, suffocated Italian literature, which in its outset had soared so high. Owing principally to the heroic efforts of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and their contemporaries, the relics of Greek and Roman lore had been rescued from the oblivious dust

of the middle ages. From that moment classical studies absorbed all attention; and all literary capacities in Italy, especially the illustrious friends and guests of Cosmo dei Medici, conspired to the deplorable attempt of reviving the dead languages, to the proscription of the living; and while filling the libraries with a vast number of Greek and Latin volumes, they left a blank of a hundred years in the national literature, which was sunk and lost, for all that long interval, and nearly plunged into utter oblivion.

Lorenzo dei Medici, at length, anxious to secure his throne upon the basis of popular favour, laboured with his gay retinue at the revival of popular songs. The Este in Ferrara, and the Gonzaga in Mantua, opened a stage for dramas and pastorals. Chivalry having reached its last period, the Italian minstrels—Boiardo, Ariosto, and Tasso—endeavoured to revive it in their strains. But with the academies the spirit of imitation and servility had already corrupted literature in its new sources, and clipped the wings of spontaneous genius. The sweet effusions of Petrarch, and the sublimest masterpieces of the Greek stage, were reproduced to infinity in languid and dull parodies by the refined but enervated crowds of the academies, and the ever-warbling swains of Arcadia.

Meanwhile, deterred from the cultivation of letters by the war that had been of late waged against thought, the gentle hearts of Raphael and Correggio turned to a more harmless and mute way of expansion, to the contemplation and the reproduction of the beautiful in the fine arts, an enthusiasm which could no longer find nourishment in the debates of public life; while other spirits of a more ardent temper, impatient of unaccustomed subjection at home, carried among strangers their restless genius, inspired them with their thirst for bold enterprises, guided them to new discoveries by land and by sea, or spread among them the sparkle of light which they had taken from the sun of their country.

IV. Next came the age of foreign dominion, or the age of decline. It commenced with the first invasion of Charles VIII. of France, and ended with the epoch of the French revolution. It was a succession of inroads of French and Spaniards, Swiss and Austrians, by turns invited and expelled by the Italians themselves, until those deluded partizans were forced to acknowledge a master in each of the auxiliaries they had the imprudence to evoke. Yet neither was this deplorable period destitute of high interest, nor did Italian independence

set without leaving glorious records. The complete subjection of Italy was the work of three centuries, and the present generation have witnessed the last blows that were struck at it. All this long interval was a progressive school of degradation and baseness, a state of society verging to its utmost decay; an age in which men lost all energy, even for crime. Such was Italy in the hands of strangers, for wherever a spark of independence still fluttered, there the Italian spirit renewed its prodigies of valour; and the long struggles of Venice against the Ottoman powers, the wars of the house of Savoy against France and Austria, and the frequent revolts at Naples, Milan, and Genoa, against inquisition and despotism, manifestly revealed a nation crushed, not subdued—slumbering, not dead.

Letters shared in the universal infirmity. It was a literature of inquisitors and jesuits, of fetters and fagots. It had its origin among the extravagances of Marini, it ended with the effeminacies of Metastasio, and the obscenities of Casti. Not, however, without exceptions: Filicaia and Fulvio Testi, Sarpi and Campanella, and a few other lofty minds, attested that the overflowing corruption had not reached the highest summits; for the human mind, when

once roused, cannot be so suddenly repressed, and it turns with redoubled activity to open new ways in proportion as the old ones are closed against it. By the side of the all-chilling Academy della Crusca, the heroic associations for the promotion of science and experiments in natural philosophy, dei Lincei and del Cimento rose, fought, and suffered; and while Marini abused his genius to dazzle his age with the tinsel of his verses, Galileo amazed the earth with his tidings from heaven.

V. The fifth or last epoch, which we would call Italy at her reawakening, dated from the days of Ferdinand and Leopold of Tuscany, of Francis I. and Joseph II. of Austria, and descended through the convulsions of the French revolution to the present times. It was an age of reaction and recovery, of disgust, of repentance. To the blind and savage sway of the Spaniards had succeeded the tardy and sleepy rule of the Austrians. The last descendants of the Italian reigning families had dropped one by one, for want of succession. The new rulers, by the enjoyment of a long peace, and by the general relaxation of manners, being now in a state of complete security, had remitted the bloody policy on which their predecessors had based their throne. While some of them in-

dulged in childish but innocent pastimes, others busied themselves with political and religious reforms. A new spirit of life developed itself in the philosophical works of Vico, Beccaria, Filangeri, and Mario Pagano, and in the historical pages of the hero and martyr Giannone: it found a more virtual utterance in the verses of the austere Parini, and in the bronze cast scenes of Alfieri.

Thus geniuses of the highest standing, encouraging and enlightening the royal reformers in their pious intentions, had commenced in the ideas of mankind a general revolution, embracing the whole theory of government and legislation; and the age was, perhaps, not far off, in which Italy might have reaped the highest advantages from that generous emulation between mind and power, between the governed and the governors, for the promotion of public welfare, had not the all-demolishing philosophy of Rousseau and Voltaire—had not the storms that roared on the other side of the Alps—had not the natural impatience of that nation, destined to take the lead of the movement in Europe, only to the ruin of her own affairs, and of others, hurried on all things for the worst, involving in her convulsions, Italy, her rulers, her philosophers, and their salutary

projects. As soon as the general catastrophe of the French revolution had arrived, the new democracy imported from Paris, and the new flame of military glory, left but little leisure for thought The brightest minds abandoned themselves to the seducing dreams of specious Utopias, they were hurried on from hope to hope, and from disappointment to disappointment, until they found themselves and their country precipitated into a lower abyss than that from which they had so late and so slowly began to emerge.

Still, as it is among the sublimest ways of Divine Providence to prepare the greatest results for the welfare of the nations of the earth in and from their deepest calamities, so it was only when, at the fall of Napoleon, the last traces of Italian existence were nominally and effectually blotted out in the final fate of Venice and Genoa—it was only when it was evident that Austria had power to drive her artillery from one end of the peninsula to the other—that the name of Italy began to sound clear, glorious and sacred, though undefined, vague, and new in the ears of her sons, and that the desire and will arose in their hearts, ardent, eternal, inextinguishable, of having an Italy.

Italian literature made but little progress in the days of the French revolution. But the

powerful influence it began to reassume in the turmoils of those rapid commotions, the enthusiastic and chivalrous character of Ugo Foscolo shining to so great an advantage by the side of the versatile courtiers of Napoleon, Cesarotti and Monti, and of the harmless but inactive dreamer, Pindemonte, raised and dignified the trade of poetry by associating it with the sanctity of patriotism, as minstrelsy was once associated with all the splendour of chivalry: and Italian literature gradually assumed that militant, martyr-like mood that alone befits an age of redemption.

What the thinkers of the age of Leopold of Tuscany had prepared, what the warriors of the age of Napoleon had hastened, the martyrs of our age are drawing to a close. The revolutions of Naples and Turin in 1820, the insurrections of Romagna, Modena, and Parma in 1831, the attempts of Savoy in the following years, are not the battles that Italy fights for her regeneration. They are only the symptoms of a fever that is burning in all her veins, and that must have frequent though ill-timed explosions. Italy has not yet entered the field; hitherto she has only shed the expiatory blood of victims to sanctify her cause before heaven and earth, and the struggle has been confined within the walls of

the dungeons of Spielberg, and at the foot of the scaffolds of Modena.

Italian literature in our age recommends itself to the sympathy rather than to the admiration of strangers. It cannot stand the comparison with England and Germany; it cannot range by the side of past ages. It is comparatively sterile and silent, but it is equally uncontaminated and pure; but it follows its straightforward course, fearless of the frowns of tyranny, until its sacred mission be accomplished, and that vengeance of Heaven, that visits the misdeeds of our forefathers farther down than the fourth generation, be finally appeased.

The fate of the editors of the Conciliatore, of the Antologia, and other organs of public opinion, evidently shows what chance there remains for the champions of truth: the fortunes of Foscolo, Pellico, Botta, and a hundred others, can prove how dangerous it is in that country to raise one's head above the common level; and the suspicion and espionage hovering above such as have hitherto escaped uninjured, leave little to be envied by their brothers in exile abroad.

But we have reason, perhaps, to rejoice at such a state of extreme violence; for only in

extreme evils extreme remedies are found. That hand that roused Italy from the desolation of the middle ages, that stamped in the serene brow of that queen of nations, "Esto perpetua," is hastening to her rescue. Italy has more than once languished and revived, and she never sank from her glories without rising younger and greater.

The phœnix has been consumed upon her funeral pyre. Her last breath has vanished in the air with the smoke of her ashes; but the dawn breaks; the first rays of the sun are falling upon the desolate hearth; the ashes begin to heave, and from their bosom the new bird springs forth with luxuriant plumage, displaying her bold flight, with her eyes fixed on that sun from which she derived her origin.

ITALY.

FIRST PERIOD.—MIDDLE AGES.

CHAPTER I.

AN HISTORICAL, ETHNOGRAPHICAL VIEW OF THE MODERN ITALIAN RACES.

Importance of Italy in the Middle Ages—Fall of the Roman Empire—The Lombards—The Carlovingian Dynasty—The German Emperors—The Lombard League—The Maritime Towns—The Two Sicilies—The Popes—Characteristic differences of the Italians in different provinces.

FEW spaces in the realms of memory are filled up by more highly interesting scenes than the long interval between ancient and modern civilisation; that period of darkness and violence, which historians have designated by the name of *the Middle Ages*. That epoch was to Europe, what, to the globe, was one of those great convulsions of which only imperfect traditions and vague conjectures reveal to us the ultimate effects. It fixed anew the boun-

daries of land and water, established in a general equilibrium the hostile elements, traced the course of mountains and the beds of rivers, and gave the surface of the earth its geological physiognomy. The Middle Ages are to us what the heroic times of her demigods were to Greece, fertile in scenes of peril and strife, among which the imagination loves to expatiate, but of which reason cannot desire the reproduction. The spirit of poetry and romance clings to those feudal memorials, as the domestic genius does to the ruins of the ancient gothic towers and mansions, whose inmates had lived under his special protection. It seems as if those lofty piles of building could only have been reared by a generation of giants, and before them we feel disposed to look upon ourselves as a degenerate race.

But the Middle Ages are fertile in more salutary lessons than can be derived from poetical or romantic inspiration. There is hardly in the existing order of society a single political, religious, commercial, or scientific system, not essentially dating, by its origin or by its reorganization, from the convulsions of that tempestuous era. Hence the efforts of men of superior talents have for many years been chiefly directed to dispelling the clouds

that had long settled upon those ages; nor is it likely, that their pursuits on so great a subject will cease, as long as there remain parchments to unroll, inscriptions to decipher, or ruins to unbury.

There was, in that period of general social dissolution, one country, in which the work of devastation commenced much later and ended much sooner. Italy in the Middle Ages was like Mount Ararat in the deluge; the last reached by the flood, and the first left. The remains of the Roman social world, were either never utterly dispersed in that country, or far later than any where else; and, if we are to date the close of the Middle Ages from the extinction of feudalism, that revolution was effected in Italy no less than three centuries before the time of Charles VIII. of France, the epoch assumed by historians as the close of the period. The history of Europe in the Middle Ages must necessarily be referred to Italy, as the history of the ancient world has always been referred to Rome. The great ascendency of the papal power, and the influence of Italian genius on the literature and the fine arts of all countries, made Italy essentially the centre of light, the sovereign of thought, the metropolis of civilisation.

The history of Rome and the history of modern Italy are no more related to each other than a tragedy is to the after-piece. Not only the nations and their language, not only manners and morals, laws and gods, have given place to others; not only the monuments of men have been swept from the face of the land; but the land itself, its general aspect, and its very climate, are changed.

The fall of the Roman empire under the invasion of the northern nations was, for Italy not less than the rest of the world, an event as desirable as it was inevitable. Rome and Roman Italy had ceased to live long before any foreign nation even ventured across the Alps. It was a superannuated body, which in the last struggle against imminent dissolution, by an animal instinct summoned all its vital principles to the heart, only to witness the fate of its members, and prepare for its own. Rome, as is related of a few fortunate pirates and robbers, after escaping all the trials of a life of peril and violence, was consumed by inanition, and died of old age.

The barbaric invasion had then the effect of an inundation of the Nile. It found a land exhausted with its own efforts, burning and withering under the rays of the same tropical sun which

had called into action its productive virtues, and languishing into a slow decay, from which no reaction could ever redeem it. Then, from the bosom of unexplored mountains, prepared in the silence of untrodden regions, the flood roared from above—the overwhelming element washed away the last pale remnants of a faded vegetation; but the seasons had their own course. Gardens and fields smiled again on those desolate marshes, palms and cedars again waved their crest to the skies in all the pride of youth, as if singing the praises of the Creator, and attesting that man alone perishes, and his works—but Nature is immortal.

The slow process of depopulation, by which the corruption of the capital had wasted the fairest provinces, was hurried for the worst by the ruthless rage of the conquerors. What yet remained cultivated and inhabited was trampled under the hoofs of the horses of Alaric. They came: they enjoyed all the luxury of destruction, but they and their myriads vanished among the ruins of the country, like a river lost among the sands which it heaps up at its mouth.*

* Rome was taken by Alaric, A. D. 410. The invasion of Attila, was in 451. The storming of Rome, by Genseric, in 455.

Until the age of Odoacer and Theodoric,* there was nothing but ravage and ruin. But by this time the advantage of a superior culture, and the influence of a purer religion, had softened the iron hearts of the North, and, under the auspices of these two monarchs, the first stone was laid of the new social edifice.

But the fates of Italy were not fulfilled. That last citadel of the ancient empire could not be taken before the ditches were filled up and the entrenchments paved with the bodies of the brave, who devoted themselves for their followers. The reign of Theodoric stands alone, in those ages of darkness, like a beautiful star in a retired spot of the heavens; but his successors, harassed by civil discords, and engaged in long struggles against the Greeks of Belisarius and Narses, lay finally at the mercy of a new enemy, who, invited as a mediator in the contest between Greeks and Goths, ended by possessing himself, without resistance of the prize.

The crowning of Alboin, king of the Lombards, in Italy, about the year 568, must be considered as the epoch of the great crisis which divided ancient from modern Italy.

* Odoacer, king of Italy, A. D. 476. Theodoric, 493.

Here we lose the traces of the old religion and language: since then Rome, and all the charm of her name, belong to the past.

The Lombards were in Italy what the Saxons were in England. They were considered as the bravest, the freest, as well as the most barbarous of all barbaric races. Their ranks had been thinned in their long struggles on the other side of the Alps, but they were followed by innumerable allies and subjects; and the conquest of Italy having not cost them a drop of blood, the whole host settled on the land, rather as new tenants than conquerors. They carried along with them their wives and families—all they held dear in life. They left nothing behind them to regret. Long since a tribe of wanderers, they cherished their adopted home with that fatal enthusiasm with which fair Italy is but too apt to inspire all foreigners. They shared the lands with the conquered, or rather they seized upon the lands the conquered had abandoned. They adopted the religion of Italy—Italy adopted their morals; laws and language were mixed, and the opposite elements were cemented by a long and comparatively peaceful contact of nearly two centuries. The scattered remains of the Vandals and Goths of the previous invasions were easily

adopted as sons by the conquering tribe, by right of consanguinity; and the Latin nation, already reduced to atoms, was either dispersed or assimilated.

Together with their martial spirit, their active and laborious habits, their love of home, and their domestic virtues, the German nations gave Italy, as well as all Europe, that form of government, of which we have in our times witnessed the final catastrophe,—the feudal system. From the top of the Alps, the northern chief pointed out to his warriors the fair land that Fate had awarded to their valour. The land of promise was no sooner subdued and divided among them, than it was necessary to put it in a state of defence. The conquering host settled on the country, as it were, in battle array. Every soldier was at his post, dependent upon his *vavasors*, under the continued discipline of the camp.

It appears, that the Lombards exercised a milder rule over their Latin subjects, than either the Franks in Gaul, or the Vandals in Spain and Africa; but the Italian population had already suffered so much under the previous invasions, that the whole nation might be considered as doomed to absolute servitude.

Such a state of violence, however, could not

last. The Latin population had long since learned submission and patience. Respected and dreaded, the conquerors soon became weary of an unprofitable tyranny. There is no man willing to strike where he meets with no resistance. The idea of allegiance to their chiefs, so strong among the warriors of the north, was easily communicated to the Latins, to whom no better choice was left. The evils of feudalism gave way in the same measure as the characteristic differences of the two races disappeared; in the same measure as, involved in common vicissitudes, they needed each other's co-operation.

Meanwhile a religion of meekness and charity called the blessings of Heaven on the warrior who spared the prostrate foe, and who dried the tears his sword had caused to be shed. Religion and gallantry soon made humanity an indispensable appendage of true valour. Thus chivalry or rather the chivalrous spirit was a consequence of the feudal system, as it was an antidote against its evils.

But the Lombards did not subdue the whole country. The maritime cities of the Adriatic and of the Mediterranean, garrisoned by the Eastern emperors, and defended by the hunted down Latins, who came to them for a refuge, offered a long and not unsuccessful resistance.

But Rome, which, though nominally acknowledging the sovereignty of the Cæsars of Constantinople, already, in fact, obeyed the influence of the pontiffs, proved a more insurmountable obstacle to the Lombard ambition. The Franks, always restless neighbours during the whole period of the Lombard dominion, now invited by the popes, marched twice to their rescue, and finally relieved them from all fear, by putting an end to the dynasty of Alboin.*

But this last convulsion had not the same effects which the preceding inroads had upon the country. Charlemagne led an army with him, not a nation. He found a settled and a flourishing state, which he had no wish, or no interest, to disturb. The Lombard dukes had long since by their feudal rivalries, been disposed to defection. The cause of the crown was no longer their cause. They favoured a conquest that was to sanction that independence which they had, in fact, already usurped. The whole nation laid down their arms, either through treason or surprise. Those who could fight would not, and those who would could not. The French king, having opened an unknown road across the Alps, arrived in the heart of

* Charlemagne's conquest of Italy was in A.D. 774. His coronation took place at Rome, on Christmas-day, A.D. 800.

the kingdom without unsheathing his sword. Having thus rescued the pope, threatened by the Lombards, and settled in haste his new conquest, he led his host to the accomplishment of his most christian vow of baptizing the Saxons in blood, and left the national body of the Lombards safe and untouched; with nothing changed but the royal dynasty.

The subjection of Italy to Charlemagne and his successors was little more than a nominal vassalage. The Lombard dukes and marquises, already absolute masters of their own estates under their national dynasty, increased their powers without limit under the French dominion, whose conquest they boasted to have favoured by their ignominious desertion. Some of them, such as the duke of Benevento, were never definitely subdued by the conqueror himself; but no sooner had his vast empire fallen into the hands of his degenerate descendants, than the independence of the Italian lords became more and more unquestionable, and the princes of the house of France, invited and expelled by turns by the factions of their unruly vassals, were forced to abdicate their precarious dignity. (A. D. 888.)

The sceptre of Italy, thus fallen from their hands, successively passed from one to another

of the Italian dukes, until, exhausted by their national feuds, and harassed by the Hungarians in the north and the Saracens in the south, they were compelled to resign their claims into the hands of the German, Otho the Great, who by his virtues and firmness restored peace to the best part of the Peninsula. (A. D. 961.)

From Otho and the princes of his family, but much more from their successors of the houses of Franconia and Swabia, date those long and envenomed quarrels between papal arrogance and imperial ambition, which shook the social order in Germany and Italy to its very foundation.

We are now approaching the great crisis, during which the long faults and misdeeds of the rulers opened the eyes of the astonished multitude, and awoke them from their torpor. Till now the Italians had been silent and passive, but not blind spectators of amazing scenes. They had seen, during the Carlovingian dominion, emperors and monarchs, whose persons they were used to deem sacred and inviolable, deposed, imprisoned, and put to death by their rebellious vassals. They had seen, during the German dynasty, the descendant of the Cæsars kneeling to the successor of St. Peter, and the haughty priest trampling under his foot the

head of the anointed of the Lord. They had seen two or more popes at one time styling all their rivals false prophets and antichrists, and, at the end of the contest, the conqueror received as the chosen of God. Nothing was any longer sacred in the eyes of the people; they knew no power but from the evils it inflicted—they acknowledged no law but the right of the stronger, and it was not long before they perceived that they themselves were the stronger.

The frequent inroads of so many different armies had placed the whole country in a state of continual alarm. The feudal lords, secure in their eyries reared in the fastnesses of the Alps and Apennines, in hours of danger left the plain utterly unprotected. In progress of time the cities, abandoned to themselves, claimed the right to provide for their own safety by raising their walls, which had lain prostrate ever since they had been levelled to the ground by the barbaric invasions. The youth of the cities were bred up to the use of arms, and this practice inspired them with a boldness springing from a consciousness of their own strength.

Respected from without, the cities became reluctant to all submission within. In pro-

portion as they rose in wealth and prosperity, they became warmly and obstinately attached to those municipal privileges and immunities which since the age of Otho I. were granted to all the imperial cities. Their feudal lords, whom the policy of the German emperors had always conspired to weaken by division, were obliged to give way to their mutinous subjects, and retired to their manors, where they were soon in their turn to receive laws from the cities.

Thus that feudal system which, though imperfectly, was first introduced into Italy by the Lombard kings, and proved fatal to its institutors, improved and enlarged by the successors of Charlemagne, ended by snatching the sceptre from their hands; but the contagious spirit of insubordination, of which that system had set the first example, turned against the system itself; and democracy rose against feudalism with that same success with which feudalism had overthrown monarchy. This was a slow and indefinite work, the different periods and progress of which it would not be easy to trace. It was not a conspiracy, and not an insurrection; it was the fruit of sad experience, a long school of disasters and sufferings; it was a general tendency to association and brotherhood, an imperceptible but uninter-

rupted series of concessions and encroachments, a gentle spirit of resistance, at first faint and passive, but which was to end by carrying every thing before it. It was one of the many wonders which Providence matures under its shade of mystery, and commits to the slow working of time.

As early as the beginning of the eleventh century, the people, especially in Lombardy, acknowledged no rule. Only their fondest reminiscences of the past still bound them to the name of the Roman empire, to which they referred all their hopes for the unity and greatness of their country. The imperial crown, revived after long oblivion to be laid on the brows of French, and more lately of German monarchs; still preserved all the prestiges that the earliest associations of the national glories had attached to it. But the repeated usurpations of feudalism, a succession of stormy elections in Germany, and the long contests between the altar and throne in Italy, had long since undermined the foundations of the imperial power in the same measure as it had stripped the imperial purple of all its splendour and dignity. That last shade of power and dignity Italy would never have attempted to shake off, but for the ambition of a man who,

by calling the rights of the people into question, was to give those rights a sacred, indisputable sanction.

Frederic Barbarossa, a young emperor distinguished by eminent political talents, no less than by chivalrous valour, and by a generous and steady temper, having succeeded in captivating all spirits in Germany, beheld with an indignant look the free air of the emancipated townships of Italy.

Seconded, by a rare occurrence, by the unanimous efforts of Germany, he crossed the Alps to recall the rebels to their allegiance. There was a long and calamitous struggle. The flower of the German youth were called to find their tomb on the Lombard plain. The most flourishing cities of Italy were burned and rased to the ground. But the hand of the Lord of hosts was with the champions of liberty. The scourges of God conspired to thin the ranks of the invaders. The Roman pontiffs, for once the friends and allies of the country, made the national contest the cause of Heaven. Prodigies of more than Roman heroism were performed before the walls of Cremona, Tortona, and Milan. Finally, hardened by long trials, and glowing with the fire of patriotism, the bare breasts of undisciplined

burghers stood all the shock of the heavy chivalry and of the scythed chariots of Frederick—the proud host was routed and scattered, and its leader learned, for the first time, the "bitter steps of flight."*

The contest of the Lombard league was among those few in which right and wrong were not, as usual, indiscriminately blended. The battle of Legnano was one of those combats which all humanity applaud—for which, as for Morat and Morgarten, we are prompted to thank and praise Providence that men were taught to unravel the iron from the bowels of the earth to plunge it into each other's bosoms—one of those few fields in which human blood fell sacred and holy, like Christ's own blessed blood, which was also shed for the universal emancipation of mankind.

The peace of Constance, signed 1183, and guaranteeing the independent rights of the Italian cities, thus ended a contest that had continued nearly thirty years—the first and noblest struggle in modern Europe between liberty and despotism. The peace of Constance

* Frederic Barbarossa enters Italy, A.D. 1154. Burning of Tortona, 1155. Siege and destruction of Crema, 1159. Milan rased to the ground, 1162. Lombard League, 1163. Building of Alexandria, 1166. Battle of Legnano, May 29, 1176. Peace of Constance, June 29, 1183.

closed the middle ages for Italy, and gave her for a long time the lead among the civilised nations. The emancipation of the Helvetian and Hanseatic leagues followed at a later period, nor were they of so general and so great importance, nor was the resistance so long and so sublime, nor was independence bought at so high a price. Six armies successively, drawn from the most warlike nation of Europe, led by an emperor than whom there never was one wiser or mightier from Otho I. to Charles V., failed in subduing the undisciplined militia of unorganised towns, a great number of which sided by the imperial standard.

But even before the largest and most compact part of the nation had arrived at such a happy result, the maritime cities had preceded the inland towns in ensuring their own independence.

The Italian sea-ports, secure in their impregnable situation, remained under the protection of the Greek emperors, and had in many instances sheltered the last relics of the Latin population from the rage of the barbaric invasions.

The Cæsars of Constantinople, however, generally a wicked and feeble race, were obliged, for self-defence, to withdraw, from what they called their province of Italy, the protecting

garrisons to the centre of the empire, and the Italian towns, left to their own resources, obtained or usurped the right of raising armies and fleets; and in proportion as they began to suffice, they also felt that they belonged to themselves. In process of time religious persecutions excited among the Italians hatred against a power which had hitherto been borne with contempt, and every bond to Constantinople was broken.

First to spring into her young and vigorous existence was the queen of the Adriatic, Venice. This glorious and unfortunate republic, whose origin is coeval with the first calamities of Rome, founded by a few illustrious exiles of the neighbouring shores, from the times of the first inroads of Alaric and Attila, received into its walls the victims of all the successive disasters. Arising, as it were, from the ashes of ancient Italy, Venice was destined to be the first lustre of modern Italy. Her efforts, however, were early turned towards her native element, and for a long time she preserved herself neutral and stranger to the incessant convulsions of the main land.*

On the other side, Pisa and Genoa, from the beginning of the eleventh century, free

* The inhabitants of the Venetia repair to the Lagoons of

and independent states, already appear manfully struggling against the Saracens of Sicily and Spain, subduing Sardinia and Corsica, and rivalling Venice in her eastern emprises. The origin of these three republics, as indeed of all the free states of the Middle Ages in Italy, is buried amid the darkness of ages; the fame of their victories is but imperfectly preserved in their annals, and the very names of many of the heroes that led them to their daring achievements are utterly lost to posterity.*

Far different were the destinies of the south. The southern towns of Magna Græcia and Sicily, from immemorial time settled by Greek colonies, clung with more fondness to the eastern empire, and their nominal allegiance to the throne of Constantinople was never entirely shaken off, though they enjoyed long since an almost uncontrolled independence.

But, as early as the first period of the Carlovingian dynasty, the Saracens of Africa, who longed for an opportunity to carry their ravages on the plains of green Italy, led by

the Adriatic from the invasion of Attila, A.D. 452. Election of the first Doge, 697. Building of Venice, near the island of Rialto, 809. St. Mark patron of the city, 829. Istria and Dalmatia united to the Republic, 997.

* Pisa and Genoa conquer Sardinia, (1017—1050.) Conquest of the Balearic Islands, 1113.

Euphemio di Messina, landed in Sicily, and inflicted upon that fairest of islands a havoc and slaughter from which it never recovered. By this work of destruction the Africans having secured their conquest, they turned their arms to Sardinia and Corsica, and granted no truce to the adjacent shores of the mainland.*

It was among the hostilities between these new barbarians, the Lombards of Benevento and Salerno and their Grecian rulers, that the cities of Naples, Amalfi, and Gaeta, set up their independent standards, and, secure in the strength of their walls and the skill of their vessels, they bore a long struggle, gallantly riding from one end to the other of the Mediterranean, free as the waves which they furrowed, and the winds which waved their standards.

But towards the end of the tenth century a new people, or rather a handful of pious Norman adventurers, settling at first merely as private knights and auxiliaries, by a rare valour and a more rare policy, ended by subduing the last remains of the ancient Lombard principalities of Benevento, Salerno, and Capua, as well as the Greeks and Saracens;

* Invasion of the Saracens in Sicily, 828.

and the free cities themselves, who had invoked their protection, were forced to acknowledge their sway.*

Thus, in less than half a century, and about half a century before the peace of Constance assured for the north of Italy the free enjoyment of democratic institutions, the monarchical and feudal system was founded in the south by the Normans—a basis of that edifice which has lasted until our days—the kingdom of the Two Sicilies.

The efforts of the Lombard league, crowned by the peace of Constance, secured for all Italy the uninterrupted enjoyment of her independence. The contest was not essentially renewed till early in the following century by Frederic II., grandson of Barbarossa, and heir to the most eminent qualities of his predecessor.

This young monarch, who united to the imperial dignity the crown of the Two Sicilies, devolving upon the house of Swabia after the extinction of the Norman line, was early engaged in envenomed feuds against the holy see and the free states of northern Italy, which papal intrigues had enlisted in its cause.

* Conquest of the two Sicilies by the Normans, 1041—1090. Fall of Amalfi, 1131. Conquest of Naples, 1138.

Divided as they were by their ancient factions of Guelphs and Ghibelines, the last of whom stood by the emperor, the Lombard league still proved too formidable an adversary for the imperial might. Harassed by the inveterate hatred of the popes, deserted by his barons and allies, disheartened by the rebellions of his children, notwithstanding some signal victories, Frederic, routed by the Guelphs at Parma, and his son being taken prisoner at Bologna, was forced to give up the contest, and died overcome by his disasters.* His sons, Conrad and Manfred, heirs to the throne of Naples and Sicily, but not to the imperial crown, were successively overthrown by the popes, and with them the Ghibeline faction and the imperial influence lost for a while their ascendency.

During the wars against the second Frederic, the cities of Tuscany, and those of the duchy of Spoletto and the Marches of Ancona, either joined the common league of the Lombards, or formed new alliances between themselves; but through the artful insinuations of the

* Frederic II. crowned, 1220. Renewal of the Lombard League, 1226. The Lombard allies defeated at Cortenova, 1237. Frederic II. routed at Parma, 1248. Hensius, his son, vanquished at Bologna, 1249. Death of Frederic, 1250.

popes, the last were induced to place themselves under the immediate patronage of the holy see, and the first declared themselves, and were for a long time the best champions of the Guelph party, and of the rights of the church. Still, whilst nations trembled, and monarchs cowered before the thunders of the Vatican;—notwithstanding the real or supposed donations of Constantine, Pepin, and Charlemagne, and the more substantial bequest of the Countess Matilda,—notwithstanding the talents and boundless ambition of Gregory VII. and the popularity of Alexander III., it was only by gradual usurpations that the popes dared to extend their influence over the neighbouring states, and their power was still far from being thoroughly established even in Rome. This city, which had hitherto nominally acknowledged the sway, first of the eastern, afterwards of the French and German empire, had, in fact, either been ruled by papal theocracy, or, breaking into endless rebellions and feuds, had been plunged for whole ages into a state of absolute anarchy. The papal power seemed to be more systematically settled in Rome by Innocent III. in the days of Frederic II.; but it was for more than three centuries warmly disputed, and more than once entirely shaken

off; so difficult a task it was then to teach the Italians the arts of servitude.

From the epoch of the crowning of Alboin, we have dated the first setting in of the Middle Ages in Italy. From the peace of Constance we enter into the age of Italian liberties. All the events that took place during that long night of six centuries seem to lead to this happy result—Italy recalled into existence. By this time the northern hive of the nations was exhausted; the Normans had been the last tribe wandering in search of a home; the foundation of the great monarchies of Europe was laid. Armies and fleets were still busy in their works of destruction, but each nation had settled within defined limits, and belonged to the soil no less than the forests and mountains among which they had chosen their abode.

The original marks of their different primitive descent can still be perceived, even after such a long lapse of years, and after so many vicissitudes, in the features and characters of the inhabitants of the several districts of the country, offering an infinite variety to the observer, seldom to be found in other countries.

It has been generally remarked, as a subject of reproach, that the Italians are a degenerate race, unworthy of treading a soil that bred

once the conquerors of the world. But the inhabitants of Italy have no need, if they have no right, to claim their descent from the Romans of old. The name of Italy and Italians, even in modern times, is too beautiful for that people to envy any nobler appellation. The annals of Milan, Florence, and Venice, give them arguments enough for national pride. The names of Dante, of Columbus, of Galileo, which they possess in common, have little to dread from a comparison with the fairest names of antiquity. Unfortunately, even this modern appellation conveys a vague, indeterminate meaning. There exists no Italy except on the maps, and in the heart of a few believers; there is no people entitled to the appellation of Italians; and the subjects of the kings of Sardinia or Sicily, or of any other of those petty states, are called so by foreigners only by way of courtesy, as the title of lord is given to the eldest sons of English peers, as a designation, not of what they are, but of what they will be one day. The confines of the ten or twelve divisions into which the country is now dismembered, were laid only according to the arbitrary rule of fortune, founded on the rights of marriages, alliances, and successions, by which Italian lands were always cast into the

scales of European diplomacy to balance accounts. But nature had drawn other lines of demarcation between the sons of Italy, in consequence of their different origin, and of the different career they have run, which might have perhaps been an obstacle to future union and concord, had not the arbitrary dealing of her conquerors so far violated those natural limits that it is now no easy task to discover their traces.

The population of the Vales of the Po and Adige, of all that vast tract that lies between the Alps and the Apennines down to the Adriatic Sea, and which is still distinguished by the vague appellation of Lombardy, the fairest as well as the richest part of the country, preserves eminent marks of its northern origin. This beautiful plain, fenced, as it were, by its two snowy ridges, smiling like a garden, spreading like an ocean, with a thousand rivers rushing from the hills, a thousand towns glittering on the plain, crowded with ten millions of human beings, blessed with a severer but a healthier climate, dividing the vaunt of being the best cultivated land in Europe, only with England and Holland, exhibits all the vigour of an eternal youth. Since immemorial time the field where

all Christian combats were fought, since three centuries the prey of all foreigners, it seems to derive from the inexhaustibleness of its soil the sources of exuberant vitality.

The Lombards (by which appellation ought to be understood, not only the actual subjects of Austria, but all the people distinguished by kindred dialects, such as the Piedmontese, the inhabitants of Parma, Modena, Bologna, and Romagna, down to Ravenna, and Rimini,) are to be distinguished among the sons of Italy by their fair hair and complexion, large serene eyes, tall and portly but seldom elegant forms; they are of a sanguine temper, which is often turned into apathy in mature age. Living in a rich country, they are early addicted to epicurean tastes, and their comparative tardiness of mind, joined to their fondness for animal enjoyments, have won them from their southern brothers the appellation of Lombard wolves, or Bœotians of Italy. But from the earliest ages they displayed the greatest talents in agriculture, commerce, and industry; and though they came late into such business, they perhaps still excel, in our days, in the useful as well as in the fine arts, and in every branch of science and letters. The Lombards are a true, generous, and hospitable race; though perhaps

slow and phlegmatic, plain and credulous, they participate in some degree in the best and worst qualities of their neighbours the Germans. But on their firmness and constancy lie the best hopes of the country; they are the stoutest hearts in the days of battle; and the veterans are not all dead of those Lombard legions who less than thirty years ago used to drive Austrians and Hungarians before them, all over the continent.

Venice, owing, as we have seen, its origin to the barbaric invasions, was perhaps, the only spot in all Italy, pure from barbaric mixture. The Venetian aristocracy, the noblest of all aristocracies, hardened by the constant exertions demanded by their situation, inflamed by a sincere though perhaps selfish patriotism, displayed for a long time a valour worthy of a better fate. The dark and bloody policy which stained the last period of that ill-fated republic, has been, we think, too long exposed and execrated even to exaggeration, and it is full time that peace should be granted, at least, to the memory of Venice, since little more than her memory remains. Her native element, the sea, is now receding from her lagoons, like a faithless friend in the hour of adversity; and she lies down lifeless and mute,

a spectre city, insensible of her rapid decay, dead almost to the fondest hopes and to the revengeful wrath universally cherished in the Italian bosoms, as if the sentence that laid her low were irrevocable, and the hour of Italian redemption, however soon it may strike, would always be too late for the revival of Venice.

The Genoese, secure in the barrenness of their rocks, the descendants of the fierce Ligurians, escaped foreign mixture to a great extent, and preserved their hardy and thrifty habits through the Roman and all the following phases. Genoa, the queen of the Mediterranean, sitting on her hills like a wide amphitheatre of marble, crowned with her row of towering palaces, stretching her arms on her sea,—that bluest of seas—in the attitude of sovereignty,—Genoa, like Venice, arising from liberty, survives her liberty; struck by the same blow, by which Venice was undone, she preserves all the nerve of her cohesive activity.

The Genoese, still acknowledged as the best sailors in the Mediterranean, the most uncontaminated race in Italy, sober, enduring, indefatigable,—as if to scorn the assertion that activity and hardihood are incompatible with a soft, luxurious climate,—are to be known, not only amidst the Italians, but among any other

nation they mix with—even after several generations—for their sharp but keen features, their small black eyes, their short and agile stature, and their harsh and truly barbarous dialect. Joining a spirit of pomp and show to their sparing habits, and to their proverbial avarice, they have raised temples and palaces with more magnificence than taste, but they have warred against all difficulties of nature, and raised their gardens and villas on the crags of the Apennines, and on the sands of the sea. A race of rovers and adventurers, they settle in the four parts of the globe, and their device is: "Ubi bonum ibi patriæ;" and yet no people are more fond or more proud of their native land, nowhere are national traditions and prejudices more inveterately cherished.

But above the shores of Genoa, and along the whole chain of the Apennines down to Abruzzo and Calabria, there lives a primitive race, distinguished by many names in different districts, but still one and the same race, entirely unknown to all foreign visitors,—perhaps that same rude population of the Aborigines that gave up the shores and the plains to civilisation, and retired to the crest of the mountains for the enjoyment of independence, and which, under no government, the weight of

bondage can reach. Too poor for taxation, too undisciplined for military conscription, those mountaineers are left to be governed by themselves, or, at the best, by their priests. These are the men against whom all the power and policy, all the summary justice of Napoleon failed; from their numbers the ranks are supplied of those smugglers and banditti, whose exploits, disfigured by the exaggerations of romance, are still forming the delight of idle readers.

Tuscany in all times, perhaps even before the Grecian era, the ruler of letters and arts, is now occupied by a soft, gentle, highly refined people, in whose slender and gracile frames, in whose elegant but effeminate features, it would not be easy to recognise the successors of those fierce partisans who, after receiving liberty as a gift from their brothers of Lombardy, were so loose and violent in abusing it, but no less warm and intrepid and desperately obstinate before they consented to give it up.

Traces of the antique Tuscan valour are to be found in Arezzo, in Pistoia, and wherever, indeed, you rise towards the Apennines; but the capital, Florence the beautiful, the Athens of modern Italy, she alone the mother of genius, who has given birth to a greater num-

ber of eminent men than all the rest of Italy put together,—Florence is now idly and voluptuously lying in the lap of her green vale of Arno, "like a beautiful pearl set in emerald," as if lulled by the murmur of her river, and by the fascination of the smiles of her climate. Sinking into a state of dejection, proportionate to the excitement of the ages of the Strozzi, worn out, undermined, enervated by a long peace, and by the artful tyranny of their princes, these people are scarcely aware that their silken ties have now been changed into an iron chain. Gay and thoughtless, vain of their bygone greatness, of their polished language, of their wide-spread scholarship, of their nice taste, of their villas, of their churches and of themselves,—the Florentines are called, perhaps not unjustly, the French of Italy.

Rome, sitting in an unhealthy desert, a venerable corpse, a dissolute convent of prelates and cardinals, whose vast empire and influence have been reduced to those tottering walls, the head of a church that has outlived her age, the capital of a state in open rebellion,—Rome, like Tithonus of the fable, has reached the last stage of decrepitude, without being permitted to die. Not only the capital, but all the provinces south of the Apennines, the lands of the

Sabini and Umbri, have contracted that levitical spirit, by which all talents and eminence are exclusively directed to the altar and its intrigues. Hence that tinge of Jesuitism that taints the Roman character in the highest classes, painted as it were in the lines of their countenance, in the sound of their mellifluous accent.

Only what is not priest in Rome, or priestly in family, or connexion, or servants of priests—the populace of the eternal city, the *Transteverini*, display in their features, costume, and manners, and more in their sudden and often generous sallies of passion, the antique Roman air, such as may, with a better education, become one day the freemen of the capital of the redeemed country; for, notwithstanding the opinion of fatalists asserting that there are no two ages for the same country and city, the sound part of the Italian believers hope that exception has been and must be made for Rome; and, elated by juvenile enthusiasm, they run with their fancy to meet the dawn of the day when their ancient and natural metropolis shall be cleared of all the priestly crowd that soil its streets, and repeopled with the *élite* of active and robust Lombards, hardy Genoese, and fiery Sicilians,—when the halls of the Vatican shall throw open their doors

to receive the representatives of the different states, to dictate the act of union and confederacy and provide for the security and happiness of generations to come.

The southern part of the peninsula, and the adjacent island, Sicily, were early settled by Dorian colonists, who gave the maritime part of the country an indelible Grecian character. Magna Græcia had schools, games, poets, and philosophers, which rivalled those of the father land. The Romans conquered, but did not demolish; they took from the Greeks more than they gave. They never changed what was good with the hope of doing better. At the fall of the western empire those Greek seaports remained, as we have seen, to the Greeks. The Saracens never had long abode beyond the Strait of Messina, and the Normans were too few to print any durable trace on the national character.

Hence the character of the Neapolitans (as Botta observes) is essentially Greek, and their levity and playfulness, their taste for sophisms and specious arguments, as well as their national dances and festivals,—all is Greek among them. The calamities of the feudal system, of the Provençal, Spanish, and Austrian yoke, by turns afflicted and quenched the live-

liness of that unfortunate population, so that so large a part of the country never played a very conspicuous part in its annals.

The people of the capital and of the paradise of Campania, never very active or energetic, are now perhaps more destitute of dignity and noble feelings than any other race in Italy; while the provinces, under a stupid, improvident administration, wallow in ignorance and misery, without industry, without commerce, nay, without any intercourse with the civilised world. Yet it must not be forgotten that that is the land of volcanoes and earthquakes,—that we tread on the ashes of half quenched fires, which can revive and glow with sudden ignition. What the Neapolitans want in education and culture they make up by natural intelligence and discernment. What in other countries is the fruit of long experience and study, is there the result of sudden fits and starts.

Thus in the late conspiracies of their *carbonari*, the lowest classes displayed a quickness of apprehension, a prudence, an energy, which needed only to be better guided to arrive at the most fortunate results; for it must be remarked that, in the Roman and Neapolitan states, the populace is physically and morally a

better race than the nobler and higher classes, because those *Transteverini* and *Lazzaroni* are, what they look, the genuine stock of those Greeks and Romans who subdued and enlightened the world; while the nobility are the descendants of Normans and other strangers, who, transplanted into a softer climate, degenerated from their original vigour without being well acclimated to their adopted country.

The islands of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, a desolation of swamps and morasses, with the *malaria* gaining ground over them, as the sands of the desert over the fertile shores of Barbary —without roads, without canals, with scarcely any sign of agriculture, and yet so smiling, so lovely, so spontaneously rich—will be one day returned, together with the Tuscan and Pontine marshes, into the hands of Italy, (whenever there shall be an Italy,) to be reconquered inch by inch from the plague to which the perversity of fortune and negligence of men have abandoned them.

The traces of the Moorish spirit, the noble and chivalrous, sober and melancholy, but revengeful and passionate temper, which characterises the Spanish blood, remain easily distinguishable in the dark olive complexion, in the pale, bilious countenance, in the guttural accent, of

those islanders. More addicted to mental than bodily exercise, fond of meditation and solitude, their passions acquire in depth what they lose in vehemence. Ambitious, vindictive, and fanatic, they pursue their schemes with unremitting perseverance, whether they meditate the deliverance of their country or the subjugation of the world. Placed in favourable circumstances, it is not very rare to find in Sicily a Procida, in Corsica a Napoleon.

These different origins of the Italian races, and their physical and moral discordance of temperament, are no longer, as we have said, an impediment to the hopes of future unity or confederacy, notwithstanding the contrary opinion emitted by foreign politicians and even cherished by a few narrow-minded patriots; no more so than the same obstacle prevents now Welsh, Scotch, and English, heterogeneous races, from living at peace under the same commonwealth, in spite of their old bloody grudges and long-indulged antipathy. The Italians have long since recovered from their municipal jealousies; they have been all educated in a severe school of common misfortunes, and the sons of different races have exchanged sympathy and hospitality at home, or joined their hands as brothers abroad in the

hour of exile. But are not even now, and since more than three centuries, Milan and Pavia, Pisa and Florence, Naples and Palermo, the most inveterate rival cities, obeying the same rule? Shall then brute force and oppression prevail over the feelings of men better than the progress of civilisation and humanity —better than a hard-won experience and a sense of common interests? Shall liberty fail where despotism succeeded?—shall independence revive what a long bondage has quenched? Ah no! all their memories and hopes, the cultivation of the same language and literature, their common religion, and the all-absorbing influence of climate, have effaced all hostile prejudices in the heart of the Italians, and what remains of their original differences can have no worse consequences than to excite a generous emulation, and conspire, by the multifariousness of their different resources, to the speediest promotion of their national resurrection. "Through various streams"—to make use of our bard's fine comparison—

> "Through various streams, from distant source,
> Your mountain-torrents widely flow;
> But lose their names, and blend their course,
> Mix'd in the eddies of the Po."—BERCHET.

CHAPTER II.

POLITICAL, RELIGIOUS, AND MORAL ELEMENTS OF SOCIAL ORDER.

Democracy and Aristocracy—Christianity—Popery—Catholicism—Convents—Reforms—Crusades and Chivalry.

If enthusiasm of public spirit, and sanctity of private manners, were sufficient to secure for a nation an independent existence, Italy would have sent her glorious freedom down to the remotest generations. The wealth and splendour to which the enfranchised cities of the Lombard league were suddenly raised, did not, for a long time, exercise their corruptive influence. The eternal state of warfare in which they found themselves engaged, from their earliest origin, was not peculiar to Italy. It was the element in which that age of steel equally breathed. But in Italy, the field of battle was a gymnastic arena from which the republics seemed to derive new vigour and

energy. It had the effect of preventing them from falling into that languor and torpor into which they would have been lulled by uninterrupted prosperity. Their spirit of enterprise, their emulous ambition, kept pace with those municipal jealousies, with those endless conflicts. Liberty, the worker of wonders, turned all poisonous seeds into sources of blessing.

But the Italian republics ran their race alone.

Liberty rose in Italy prematurely, or rather that country was doomed to run all the risks and chances of a first experiment. The higher the Lombards and Tuscans rose in their liberal aspirations, the deeper their neighbours sank into darkness and madness. The disorders of feudal anarchy still raged to their highest pitch on the other side of the Alps. The Italians led the way to a land of promise, on which they were not to set their foot. They lit a torch that was afterwards to pass over to Switzerland, and thence to Holland and Germany, to England and America, and never, or but too late, warm their bosoms again. Italy was to assume the apostleship of civilisation and freedom, and, like all other apostles, to be requited with crucifixion and martyrdom.

Those free states rose amidst the confusion of unsettled institutions and jarring opinions. The Italians loved the name of liberty more than they comprehended its meaning. They hung in hesitation between the reminiscences of the ancient world and the wants of the modern. They contrived to reconcile the advantages of republican equality with the brilliancy of chivalrous prowess. They struggled to unite the worldly wisdom of Roman policy with the pure dictates of Christian humanity. Their governments partook of the military assemblies of the feudal Champ de Mars, and of the demagogic tumults of the Forum. Scarcely emancipated from the reign of violence, they had not well learned to give always right the ascendency over strength.

The last germs of feudalism, which they flattered themselves they had uprooted, shot forth again, by a hundred ways, under the disguise of patrician aristocracy. The pomp and pageant in which the French and German courts were glittering, still dazzled their fancy with fits of regret for departed royalty. The recital of the daring achievements of chivalry inflamed their minds with a martial fire that granted them no rest. The chivalrous spirit hovered over the ruins of the castles they had

demolished, it crept to their hearts, as if from the contact of the iron mails of the lords whose bloody spoils they had donned in the intoxication of victory. It spread an air of mad, quixotic bravery, that set the whole country a waving of standards and throwing of gauntlets; espousing all quarrels for right or wrong; engaging in long unprofitable wars, to prepare with their blood the way to those evils from which, with their blood, they had only recovered.

In the first rage of republican effervescence, the feudal nobility, giving way before popular insurrection, had repaired to their strong holds in the recesses of the mountains, where their subjects did not care to persecute them; and they were, for a long time, left to the possession of their barren rocks, which they shared with the hawks and wolves of the Apennines; but, by degrees, as the citizens felt sure of their success, the nobles were allowed to share the rights of citizenship, and the two classes came thus to a reconciliation, of which the most generous and confiding was to be the victim.

The towns, which, as long as they were animated by patriotic enthusiasm, had, with their undisciplined bands, withstood the shock

of the German cavalry, felt now in their domestic feuds, the want of cavalry, the horse being, in the middle ages, the soul of battles. The noblemen, who had means and leisure for an exclusive devotion to military exercises, gave the republics their cavalry, and had soon the nerve of the state in their hands.

In times of peace the mob upon the squares checked all rising ambition by their watchful suspicion and summary justice; but at the first flourishing of the clarion of war, at the first ringing of the alarm bell, the nobleman mounted his steed, marshalled the disorderly multitude, led them to victory, and returned their idol. Thus gratitude for past services, or apprehension of impending dangers, gave aristocracy an influence which increased with the increasing frequency of war.

The noble families, when they abandoned their mountain abodes, transferred their castles into the cities. Their mansions, generally placed near the gates, under the pretence of common protection, were allowed to have battlements and portcullis, and had the appearance, as they performed the service, of citadels. No sooner were the lords possessed with the power, than they abused it with that arrogance that is proper to aristocracy. The dissensions be-

tween the lower and higher orders were not less violent in the republics of the Middle Ages than they had been in either Athens or Rome. But they were of a shorter duration. In vain did the people rise, with repeated assaults, against that rapid usurpation. In vain did they join in fraternities of arts, and organise themselves under their popular leaders. In vain were the richest burghers formed into an aristocracy of wealth to counteract aristocracy of birth. In vain were all the misconstrued forms of consuls, tribunes, and senators, such as were confusedly preserved in their traditions of the Roman commonwealth, successively resorted to as a palladium of popular sovereignty. The nobility continued to gain ground, until the people, enlisted in its quarrels and factions, became the instrument of aristocratic ambition, and, by a deplorable reaction, undid the work of their fathers, and were led back to the evils of tyranny.

The nobility of these republics, however, as, indeed aristocracy in every free state, owed their primacy not merely to their superiority in arms, but also to their eminence in all public and private virtues. The class that aimed to rule contrived to acquire such qualities as might impose upon the mass of the people. In

time of war, it was the fire of their steed and the glare of their sword; but at home it must be the power of eloquence and the wisdom of politics.

It is thus that, not only in the age of liberty but down to the following periods, we find the Italian nobility constantly aming at excellence, not only in the highest pursuits of the government of the public weal, but in science and letters, and even in arts, so that it may be fairly asserted that, with very few exceptions, all the great names in the records of Italian literature, especially such as united true elevation of character to the highest gifts of the mind, belonged to the highest classes; while, whenever genius descended to the inferior ranks of society, we have but too frequent reason to regret that the sacred spark had been wasted in the animation of unworthy clay.

The aristocracy of Italy is no more. Their patrician influence in republican times was crushed by the usurpations of national tyranny, their courtly importance under their national princes vanished in the general degradation of foreign invasions;—thus have those noblemen been the oppressors of the country in days of feudalism—the first of citizens in days of freedom—the minions of the courts in the age of oppression, and are now the first of slaves in the

hour of bondage. The abolition of the right of primogeniture, and of the last feudal orders, has struck the death blow upon the few families that were still lingering in pride and idleness under the shade of their former grandeur. No where is now the noble class as a body more ruined, more degraded, more hopelessly discredited, than in Italy.

We do not know whether we have reason to rejoice, with the warmest patriots, at such a state of things; nor can it yet be proved whether France has reaped any real advantage from a similar work of demolition.

Italy seems to be eminently a republican country. Whenever her different people, by any happy circumstance, have been masters of themselves, they have never, if we except, perhaps, the case of the Sicilian Vespers, made choice of any but a popular government. All the reigning families in the country have erected their thrones in violence; none of them is of popular choice, none of them but is derived from a race of foreign usurpers. No ruler in Italy has ever been defended with such beautiful examples of devotion as we read of in the histories of other countries. *God save the King*, and *Vive le Roi*, are shouts which find no echo in Italian hearts.

On the other hand, no republic is able to hinder true merit from shining, or people from valuing and rewarding it; nor can a man enjoy consideration and power without endeavouring to forward his descendants in the same career; nor can the people help looking with partiality and expectation towards the children of a man who has bequeathed to them his claims to public gratitude. Aristocracy is innate in society, it is inherent in our best feelings. The republic is wise which provides against its abuses, and prevents this system from becoming injurious to the common interests; the republic is wise that leaves aristocracy to public opinion without sanctioning it by law: but even this is, perhaps, more than human foresight can do; and by refusing a feudal or a patrician nobility, you shall have, as in America, a new aristocracy every generation,—the aristocracy of wealth.

The glorious career of Rome, Venice, and Genoa, on the one hand, and the fate of Milan and Florence on the other, the present prosperity of England, seem to advocate the importance of this system as the conservative principle of a free state, as the source of all that is really noble and disinterested in public life.

However, it is equally certain that nothing can be built on the wretched remains of the

Italian nobility in our days, as if it had pleased Providence to level all differences, to destroy all privileges, all prejudices in that country, that nothing should oppose the reconstruction which He is now, perhaps, maturing in His inscrutable designs.

We advance these ideas with great diffidence, because we think that the discussion of political opinions has already too long and too far injured the cause of Italy, by blending it with premature speculations and unnecessary controversies, which were better left to be calmly debated, when the great question of life and death, the cause of independence, on which all agree and which all equally understand, shall be happily decided.

It was precisely when the human families were most deeply involved in evil, when the shock of the barbaric invasions seemed mostly to threaten society with irremediable disorganization, when the necessity of a pure, holy mediator was most universally felt, that the Christian religion made its appearance in Western Europe.

From the earliest period of Christianity, Italy seemed to be designed to be its chief seat, its august metropolis. Harassed, dispersed by the Roman proconsuls in the remotest provinces of the empire, the fathers of the church

always directed their efforts towards the capital, persuaded that to prevail at Rome was to prevail over the earth. Their virtues and the will of God triumphed. Rome was Christian, and the world was Christian.

At its first appearing in Italy, the gospel found every thing wonderfully disposed for the fulfilment of the eternal will, a soil prepared for the reception of the holy seed. It found an enlightened but a degraded race, (the Latin population,) for whom the stern patriotic virtues imposed by paganism had become onerous and troublesome. It found another race, (the northern conquerors,) pure and virtuous, but rude and ignorant, willing to adopt the feelings and manners of their subjects, and desirous to conciliate them by listening to their moral and religious instructions. Hence, directed as it was by its divine promoter through natural ways, and assumed in great part from worldly motives, the gospel admirably succeeded in soothing the fierce spirit of the north, and in raising the degenerate race of the south. It interposed between man and his woes; struck down the raised arm of the violent, and dried the tears of the sufferer; and, by raising man above earth, it poured a lenient balm on such wounds as could not be healed.

Christianity came not to avenge, not to redress, but to console; it promised not justice, not peace on earth, but retribution in heaven; it did not break the chains of the slave, but shared them with him. Unable to destroy feudalism, it created chivalry; to quench the thirst for battle, it invented processions and masses. To the victims of human injustice it laid open the asylum of the sanctuary; for the blasted hopes of youth, for the exposed honour of virgins, it prepared the silence of the cloisters; against the unlimited ambition of monarchs, it mustered the thunders of the Vatican.

A day had been, (it is an unwelcome thought, but one from which we cannot escape,) a day had been when, in ages of barbarism, of oppression and prejudice, every institution that had become connected with the Christian religion, even the most absurd doctrines and pernicious practices with which Catholicism had been charged, had their holy, their redeeming influence; when Popery and the monasteries alone preserved the social system from utter ruin. But no sooner had the Christian religion triumphed than the seeds of corruption burst forth.

The ministers of the gospel, styling them-

selves the vicars of Christ, began by undoing his work. They withdrew his books and counterfeited his words; then they made their opinion a law, and enforced that law by fire and sword. They intruded themselves into the secrets of the heart, and laid conscience asleep. They monopolised the eternal clemency, and set a price for the ransom of the soul even beyond the limits of repentance: at last they sat in the Vatican, the rivals of kings in wealth, in power, in crime.

While a system of religious tyranny was thus gradually organised in the west, the eastern empire was raving with a religious licentiousness, which became the principal source of its general dissolution. The liberal-minded sons of the Romans were revolted at the venom of Grecian controversies. Religious persecutions were, as we have seen, an occasion and a pretext for political rebellion. All bonds with the eastern empire were broken, and the Italians clung to Rome, from which they perceived that new laws could still be dictated to the subjected world. Catholicism became for Italy a national property, a pledge of national union, an object of national pride. True, the Italians, as the rest of the world, and more than the rest of the world, suffered from the

despotism and ambition of the court of Rome, and the simple manners of earlier ages were shocked at the scandals of which the eternal city was the theatre; but the importance that city and the whole peninsula derived from the circumstance of being the head of the church, of receiving the homage of monarchs, and welcoming the pilgrims from all corners of the globe, sitting, as it were, in the shade of the Vatican, protected by its thunders,—by flattering the Italians in their natural love of greatness and thirst for dominion, inspired them with the idea that their cause and the cause of the church were one. In progress of time, when the great quarrel of national independence was fought against the house of Swabia by the Lombard league, the intimate alliance between the church and the people was still more closely soldered—an unnatural alliance into which the people entered with good faith for God and their inalienable rights, and the popes with schemes of ambition and revenge; an unfair play, in which the people paid with their blood and their money, the popes with indulgences and treasons; until, at the end of the contest, the pontiffs, now free from all fears on the part of Germany, conspired against the peace and liberty of those

cities to which they were indebted for their very existence.

The reign of the pope is now at an end.

It required the work of not less than seven hundred years, the whole interval between Alexander III. and Gregory XVI., a long chain of vicissitudes and revolutions, a succession of illusions and delusions, of perfidies, and crimes, and atrocities, to shake in Italian bosoms the persuasion that the Roman pontiff was their natural protector and ally, and that their destinies hung on the destinies of Rome. A great subversion of all principles must have taken place if the last successor of Alexander III., of him for whom the Lombard leaguers beheld with resignation the conflagration of their dwellings and the desolation of their families, is now compelled to sue for existence, to implore the support of those German Cæsars whose anointed head his haughty predecessors were used to trample under their feet, and sell his influence, his dignity, his conscience, for a few Hungarian battalions, with whom to keep ground against the insurrections of his disaffected provinces.

But if local interests, veneration, and gratitude, bound the Italians to the natural enemy of the enemies of their independence—if, in

the abstract, they loved and defended the papal chair, it was not seldom that they rose in arms against its unworthy occupants. Italy, during the Middle Ages the most enlightened of countries, could not be blind to the excesses which contaminated at every step the history of the church. Proximity or contact considerably tend to raise the veil before which men bow in adoration and awe; and those same excesses, which were heard with dismay and incredulity by the faithful of the far-off regions, were laid bare to the view of Italy and Rome. The Romans in consequence, have been in all times the most irreverent of Catholics. During all the period of the Middle Ages Rome was raging with anarchy, the popes were at the mercy of the nobles or of the populace of that city, involved in their bloody feuds, raised up and cast down by the prevailing party, oftentimes made prisoners, insulted, and roughly handled, by their boldest chiefs; so that at last one of them, no longer safe in distracted Italy asked for refuge in France, where the papal seat was transferred for seventy years to Avignon.

While patrician jealousy and popular factions often threatened the persons of the pontiffs even within the threshold of the sanctuary,

men of genius aimed more decisive blows especially against their temporal authority. As early as the middle of the twelfth century, at the very opening of the great national contest of the Lombard league, there appeared at Rome, an inspired monk, Arnaldo da Brescia, one of the disciples of Abelard, an apostle of religious and political freedom, who, with equal zeal, daring and eloquence won the minds of the multitude; and though driven from Italy, by the hostilities of the popes and the council of Lateran, he ventured to the charge again and again, until he perished in the attempt.* In the like manner we shall have occasion to see what fierce enemies to Rome were Dante and his age, all that illustrious senate of poets and scholars, who more or less openly sympathising with all religious sects at variance with the church of Rome, such as the Albigenses of Languedoc, the Paterini of Lombardy, and the Templars of northern France, filling Italy and Europe with their indignant invectives, tended to raise the nations to a total emancipation from Catholic bondage.

We do not hesitate to affirm, that had Italian liberty proceeded in its course, reformations

* Arnold of Brescia, preached at Rome, 1139—1143. Burnt alive, 1155.

would have taken place two hundred years before Luther—but the genius of evil prevailed. Rome strengthened in proportion as Italian independence gave way; and, using her own advantage for a wanton retaliation, became in her turn the envenomed enemy of learning, and, while apparently protecting an idle classical literature, she destined to the flames books and authors, and murmured against Providence, who had made truth proof against fire and sword.

The reign of the pope is over. The systematic attacks of the Reformation and the blasting ravages of the French revolution have demolished the last remnants of the edifice of the misplaced veneration of our forefathers. Fallen from the opinion of the firmest believers, the temporal power of Rome is destined to end with the other political calamities of the peninsula.

But whatever, in the verification of the bright expectations of the warmest patriots, may prove the destiny of the court of Rome, it is not said that it would necessarily bring with it the dissolution of the Catholic unity in Italy.—Either owing to their natural tendency, or to the reflections arising from the past, such is at present the disposition of mind of that

people, that they will sooner give up religion altogether than have it dismembered into different sects and communions. The unity of faith has always been a rallying standard to put an end to their discords and rivalries; the different orders and ranks of society have always met at church on terms of equality. Should it be otherwise, now that Italy can only live by concord and harmony?

That same calmness and soberness of judgment, that same abhorrence of cavil and sophistry, that same tolerance and liberality that deterred the Italians from plunging into the maze of Grecian heresies, has in later times equally prevented them from lending their ears to the best arguments of German Protestantism; and that spirit of forbearance and temperance contributed to strengthen the bonds of religious unity in Italy far more than the bulls of the popes and the firebrands of the inquisition, which, in many instances, both individuals and governments boldly and successfully resisted.

But, wherever a free course has been allowed to theological investigations, human minds have rushed on so inconsiderately, they have been parted so far asunder, that it would now require not less than the interference of the

power of Heaven to bring them together anew; and it is a fact, a striking, deplorable fact, that some of the Protestant denominations, by too busy a spirit of innovation, by too wide a freedom of discussion, and sometimes by the worldly jealousies and vanities of their ministers, have arrived at the same results to which the Catholics were driven by the errors and scandals of their church—scepticism and infidelity; with this difference, that the Catholics have fallen into such extremes out of disgust and resentment—the Protestants have come to them through pride and presumption.

Catholicism, perhaps, even in its greatest purity, imposed more abnegation of reason, more implicit faith, than any effort of human virtue can assent to; Protestantism gave to human curiosity and indiscretion more latitude than is compatible with religious submission. The fault in both cases chiefly consisted in the degree of authority left to the clergy. The Catholic is firmly persuaded that his priest would never wish to deceive him if he could; the Protestant flatters himself that his minister could not if he would. Hence the Catholic depends too much upon another—the Protestant relies too much on himself. But deception in Catholicism must be derived from a general

conspiracy of all the clerical orders, from the pope to the meanest of monks; error in Protestantism can be the consequence of the sophisms of a divinity-school, or of the shrewdness of a single preacher, thirsting for notoriety.

Certainly, a thinking Catholic, assisting at the ceremony where a hundred thousand people are prostrated in adoration before the vial in which the blood of St. Januarius is boiling, has occasion to blush at the creed of his fathers; but a warm-hearted Protestant, on his way to meeting, crossing a hundred currents of people walking in opposite directions, must feel a chill through his veins at the thought that all those people are treading in the path of error and perdition. The reformed denominations have always aimed to preserve religion in its simplicity and purity; the Catholics have laboured to maintain it in its splendour and majesty. The Protestants have kindled their persuasion in the light of reason; the Catholics have tempered their faith in the flames of charity; there is more in Protestantism to satisfy the mind, in Catholicism more to fill the heart.

As such considerations prevail in Italy among the most enlightened friends of religion, the

unity of faith and worship will, according to all probabilities, be preserved in its forms, though under more large and liberal views. Prelates and cardinals, abbeys and nunneries, inquisition and censure, auricular confession, indulgences, and purgatory—all these are rapidly losing their influence for ever; but Catholicism, as a name, is still revered; the most conscientious Christian in Italy has made his protest within the privacy of his heart, without being driven to an open profession of apostasy. Every man forms his sect by himself, and all those individual creeds meet in one church, as if for a tacit compact of mutual forbearance.

Together with the evil of pontifical usurpation, that of monastic seclusion ascends to the earliest periods of Christianity. Celibacy, one of the most fertile seeds of corruption of the Roman world, was fatally encouraged and reduced to system by the misconstruction of the Christian doctrines. A general belief was engendered that religion condemned all earthly affections and family ties as impediments to man in his flight to heaven; and the deserts of the mountains, the bowels of the earth, resounded with the groans of a thousand victims, who thought they were pleasing God

by abjuring his gifts—an unnatural enthusiasm and pernicious insanity!

But when those hermits abandoned the rocks of Thebaïs or the recesses of the catacombs—when their cell was changed into a palace, and that palace erected in the centre of the cities, or in their most luxurious environs—when the deathbed and public calamities began to supply the votaries of poverty—when all the noblest affections were quenched, that selfish egotism might triumph alone—when the confessional opened the way to the sanctuary of domestic privacy, and the vow of chastity was tried by a close familiarity with fair penitents—when the monastic bodies were ranked into a holy militia, to fight for the cause of ignorance, of popery, and the inquisition—we are almost tempted to cry that their judgment has come too late, and the thunder has been suspended too long.

But it would be a patent injustice to look back on bygone ages with the ideas of ours. The convents had their own day. It has been said, not without some foundation, that a great part of their vast possessions were the fruit of their industry, by which those lands had been redeemed from marshes and forests; that they first disarmed northern ferocity, and used

the respect and influence that the fame of their sanctity gave them over the hordes of the conquerors, to the protection of the helpless race of the conquered—that by their share in the temporal sovereignty they tempered the evils of feudalism, and hastened the abolition of servitude—that they first firmly protested against the superstitious practices of ordeals and judgments of God, and blunted the edge of the sword, which had so long been the sole arbiter of right and wrong in the courts of justice—that they preserved the treasures of ancient knowledge from utter dispersion in ages of darkness, and fed the sacred lamp that was to enlighten the world—that they devoted themselves to the propagation of the gospel with a constancy and heroism that subsequent missions never could equal.

But if the monks had their own day, it has set long since. The mission of the convents is accomplished: our gratitude has gone too far, and monkish pretensions still farther. There are other debts, and of more recent date, that we must be equally eager to discharge. The convents, as a system, must perish. The idle and pampered life of Franciscans—the loose morals and the tenebrous intrigues of Jesuits—the splendour and luxury of Benedictines—

the bigotry and ferociousness of Dominicans —the vow of perpetual seclusion—the slow suicide of ascetic discipline—the fiendish arts by which inexperienced souls were walled up in a living tomb—have long been judged. It is not, we repeat, it is not the fault of Italy if there are still convents and popes. The last generation witnessed the sudden abolition of all those inveterate evils, and they have only returned with the re-establishment of that old-fashioned hateful state of things against which that unfortunate nation is struggling.

The recent example of Spain can show what awful retributions must be expected on the part of a people crushed under a yoke of ignorance and fanaticism beyond the limits of endurance; Spain, turning the fire and sword against those convents from which she had learned to burn and to slay, breaking open those prisons which she had filled with victims, and raving for that liberty of which she had crucified the first martyrs. The ways of the Lord are wonderful!

The day of awakening will have in Italy all the consequences of an earthquake. Happy if the work of destruction shall be confided to the hands of men not entirely dead to all feeling, who will not forget the real wants of

the country in pursuance of wild schemes, and will not hurt the sanctity of long-cherished opinions in the wantonness of success.

There exists in the old fabric of Catholicism an awful apparatus of enigma and magic, a veil of ceremonies and mysteries, under which the church of the Middle Ages endeavoured to enshrine the majesty of eternal Truth from the gaze of mortals—a veil which the dissenting denominations have not hesitated to tear asunder, but which still lies at the foundation of the belief of the Catholic, and exists in all its integrity, whenever any of the tenets of the revelation are preserved in his heart. True, it has been discarded by many of the high-spirited youth; but not, as among the Protestant sects, in consequence of a more wide interpretation of Scripture, or of the recasting of the theological dogmas. They threw off the yoke, because they were too proud to bear a yoke. They laughed at the mysteries, because they were repugnant to their understanding. They did not comment upon the Scriptures, but spurned them altogether. They arrived at and passed beyond the doctrines of Luther, but through the school of Voltaire. But as it is the firm belief of the great majority of the people that human reason is of no avail in religion,

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and as miracles and mysteries are not the dogmas that affect the basis of the morals of Christianity, it would be, at the best, rash and gratuitous to turn the attacks of the reformation on that ground. The English and German missionaries in Italy have been unsuccessful, because they have rather too far insisted on that point. Apostles of Protestantism, and obeying the dictates of their consciences with more zeal than discernment, they have aimed their blows at a vital and sensitive part, rather than at the diseased and rotten; and their failure has been the more complete, inasmuch as the sound and righteous part of the Catholics apprehended in them ill-disguised apostles of the doctrines of error and impiety that ravage the land, while the corrupt and scoffing unbelievers scorned them as narrow-minded casuists, trifling with nice distinctions and definitions, proceeding through by-paths and tergiversations, hesitatingly scratching at the bark of what, they trust, they have already mortally wounded at the core.

The greatest number of the ceremonies and solemnities of the Catholic religion had their origin in Italy. The Latin population, when giving the new religion a hospitable reception in their pagan temples, were unwilling to part

with those rites and festivals which formed, from immemorial time, the dearest of popular amusements. Hence, with an ignorant, but guiltless mixture of holy doctrines and foolish practices, they systematised that monster of absurdity which the Protestants call Catholic idolatry. Many of those showy pageantries, in fact, could be traced back to the times of Roman, Grecian, and even Etruscan mythology. They have been handed down from generation to generation, without any regard to the changes of religious principles, as something that could be easily conciliated with all creeds, and accommodated to all worships; like some of those lofty cathedrals, that received by turns under their thousand columns the votaries of Pagan, Christian, and Mahometan faith; neutral, sceptic, unshaken, amidst the perpetual fluctuation of the opinions of men.

The foul fiends of error and fanaticism raved over desolate Europe. The history of the Middle Ages presents at every page the most melancholy pictures of the degradation of the human race. Religion had assumed all the blindness and ferociousness common to all passions in that age of blood. Apostles of terror and superstition arose in every land, with wild visions and legends of absurd miracles, with

sudden alarms and consternations, to work men's minds up to the highest pitch of feverish excitement. Disorderly bands of hooded maniacs, under the different appellations of White Hoods and Flagellants, swept over the land, like scourges of God, tracing their mad career with fagots and scaffolds. The dark satellites of the inquisition awoke the terrified cities with the red glare of their ominous pyres, while under the shade of mystery, bound by the celebration of awful rites, secret sects and tribunals weighed the destiny of powerful lords, and the devoted victim fell under their daggers, within the strong-hold of his inaccessible walls, among the joys of his hospitable feasts. In the midst of such scenes of horror it must be confessed that the multiplication of convents and nunneries, the rights of asylum granted to their sanctuaries, were hardly to be accounted as an evil; and the institution of processions and jubilees, the worship of relics and images, inasmuch as they afforded an easy gratification for that mixture of curiosity and bigotry which men mistook for religion, may be considered as an harmless diversion, as an instrument of gradual civilisation.

Sad that many of such institutions should be seen flourishing at an epoch so far remote

from the Middle Ages! But let it not be forgotten that southern races are more under the control of imagination than reason; that more may be hoped by impressing their senses than by improving their judgment; that religion, there, is love, and, like love, it wants expansion, correspondence of warm feelings, movement, rapture, enthusiasm; that the periodical celebration of annual festivities tends to refresh a zeal, which, in the daily routine of worldly occupations, is but too apt to relax; that the recurrence of universal penances and jubilees, by bringing nations into contact, contributes to rekindle in the human heart the torch of charity, which the collision of civil interests is ever extinguishing; that in the universal attendance of a whole community to a single form of worship, the individual reads, as it were, the confirmation of his own belief, and feels as if Heaven could not refuse to smile on prayers sent up with such unanimity of hearts.

Certainly, when we see numberless crowds fall prostrate as if struck by lightning, at the first appearing of a priest holding up the holy host; when the strains of unearthly music issuing from an invisible choir, wind their lingering way through the echoes of the immortal dome of Michael Angelo; when, in the

mute sweetness of an Italian sunset, the solemn peals of the Ave Maria come suddenly on the wings of the western breeze; even when in the stillness of midnight, in eastern climes, the voice of the Muezzin, deep, sonorous, oscillating, rings through the air, "waking the sons of Ishmael to prayer;" in that thrilling sensation which pervades our whole being, there arises a conviction that God is with all who lift up their hearts to him, that the smoke of our incense and the melody of our hymns can find their way to the foot of his throne, however much our mortal reason may be led into error as to the proper way of acknowledging him.

But when the ardour and brilliancy of western valour breathed a new life in the contemplative and ascetic virtues of eastern Christianity, when the red cross shone on the breast-plate of the European warriors, and their lance was couched in a war that was called holy, and the church of Christ assumed the attitude, as it had the name, of the militant church, it gave rise to, or developed, or perhaps, only perfected, that spirit which the soothing influence of a religion of love strove to substitute for the violated empire of the law, and for the loosened discipline of social order—the spirit of chivalry.

Chivalry, that mixture of enthusiasm and

extravagance that made the cause of the weak fair and sacred in the eyes of the brave, that noble school of loyalty and truth, of devotion and gallantry, of humanity and liberality—that sacred flame that tended to purify love from its earthly alloy, and raised an altar to woman,—chivalry was the right arm of Christianity in its sacred mission of peace and justice. It was among the best miracles of a religion, which, unable for a long period to disarm the ferocity of those warlike ages, pointed out to it a nobler end, and turned it by inscrutable ways into one of its most efficacious instruments.

Chivalry was the alliance of force with right.

It has long been fashionable in more sober ages to declaim against the pious folly that drove our forefathers by millions to find a premature death in the plains of Palestine. The long tale of consternation and woe that has been transmitted to posterity from the fatal success of the crusades seems to have entitled us to doubt the righteousness of their cause, as well as the policy of the undertaking, as if it had not, like all human transactions, been predisposed and directed by that sovereign hand that is often pleased to derive from our very errors and follies the most salutary results.

The crusades brought a temporary peace to

Europe. For the first time it united all Christendom into a single people.

It brought into communication all brotherly races, that climate, or ignorance, or rivalry kept asunder. It was a family meeting, in which ancient feuds were abjured or adjourned, and all animosities turned against a common enemy.

Pope Urban opened a wide field for ambition. The restless spirit of adventure, the thirst for combat, for worldly renown, for earthly dominion—avarice, emulation, curiosity—all the best and worst passions innate in the human bosom, conspired to the advancement of an expedition upon which the clergy invoked all the blessings of Heaven. Europe was gradually rid of some millions of her turbulent sons, who carried their aspiring hopes into a field where their wildest dreams seemed to fall short of reality.

That blind necessity of bleeding which the human families obey nearly every quarter of a century, was, in this occurrence at least, effected with the least consciousness of fratricide. The crusades were a folly indeed, but the Christians only recovered from it to plunge into the equally fatal but less pious follies of the wars of the Roses, of the Armagnacs and Burgun-

dians, of the Huguenots, and the League, of Cromwell and Napoleon. They ceased from their design of rescuing from profane hands the cradle of our Saviour and his tomb, but only to hunt down in his name the helpless tribes of America, or to forge chains for the innocent hordes of Africa. However severe the losses that Europe had to endure in her long struggles in Asia, we could not easily point out another epoch to which she may look back with less regret and remorse.

The crusades were the forerunners of the liberties of Europe. Rights and privileges were sold, charters granted at auction to raise money for those venturous pilgrimages; slaves were manumitted; duties of vassalage, old debts, and tributes, legally abolished, or wilfully forgotten, or settled by death. The magna charta of England and the parliaments of France date from that epoch of general convulsion.

But the best advantages were to be reaped by Italy.

Italian independence, already so far advanced, received its last sanction by the diversion of Palestine. The dispersed nobility abandoned the ill-disputed ground before prevailing democracy, and rode to the East to repair their losses, or to hide the shame of their

discomfiture. The Cæsars of Germany were forced to take the cross, and Italy was rid of their presence. The horrors of civil war and the disorders of anarchy were more than once suspended or averted by the truce of the cross.

The Italians played a brilliant part in the wars of Palestine. The flower of the Milanese youth under the guidance of their warlike archbishop, and Tancred of Apulia at the head of his Normans, followed Godfrey of Bouillon to the conquest of Zion. Amalfi gave origin to the hospital and military order of St. John of Jerusalem. Barbarossa and his grandson numbered many thousand Lombard freemen in their ranks, bound to their standards by Christian alliance. Pisa, Venice, and Genoa, furnished the best part of the naval armaments; the warriors from all countries of Europe rendezvoused in their ports. A hoary hero with unbroken spirits, the Doge Arrigo Dandolo of Venice, was seen borne in triumph on the shields of his warriors, over the battered walls of Constantinople, to share with the Marquis of Montferrat and a few French adventurers the ruins of an ancient empire. The Pisan and Genoese sailors were among the last to give way during the final siege of Acre, lavishing their blood from street to street, and from house to

house, with raging heroism, when the angel of Asia prevailed, and the Christian star faded in the East.*

But in later times, when more worldly purposes were blended with the primitive aim of those holy expeditions, while French and German barons founded their ephemeral principalities of Edessa, Jerusalem, and Antioch, our republicans laid those bases of more solid settlements in their colonies and factories, that established in their hands the monopoly of commerce, and the sceptre of the seas.

The crusades led the way to India and America.

They roused a spirit of enterprise and curiosity that was never to rest while there should be space to run, and elements to subdue. It revealed the existence of boundless regions and inexhaustible treasures. It brought into contact the two opposite ends of the globe. It made man acquainted with the full extent of his appointed abode. The luxuries of the East were spread before the enraptured adventurers of Europe; the soil itself of the West teemed with the development of eastern seeds,

* The first crusade, A.D. 1099. Taking of Constantinople by the Latins, 1204. Last siege and fall of Acre, and total loss of the Holy Land, 1291.

and unknown harvests smiled on the Lombard and Neapolitan plains.

The human mind advanced with gigantic strides. The secrets of ancient Grecian lore followed the crusaders in their retreat, the light of Arabian science dawned on the night of the Middle Ages, and the dreams of eastern poetry dazzled the obtuse fancies of the North. The softness and languor of Asiatic luxury spread its soothing influence on the fierce spirits of the warriors of Europe. Their armour was loosened and dropped from their breast as if by magic spell, and their nerve was broken as if under a shower of roses. The refinement of manners induced a general taste for intellectual enjoyments, and mental power gradually assumed its ascendency over bodily strength.

Such were the direct and immediate consequences of the crusades on the progress of European civilisation; but the indefinite impression they left on the minds of posterity had more lasting and more magical results. For, the human mind, when abating by degrees from its primitive energy, and sinking into more tame and homely pursuits, is apt to return with restless regret to the romance of past ages; and the good old times of the

crusades, generally considered as the golden age of chivalry, haunted the imagination of all successive generations, the dearest theme of inspiration, the most heart-thrilling chord of the poet's harp.

The spirit of chivalry did not die off with the striking of the last Christian flag in Palestine, nor is it even in our days hopelessly lying by the side of the tombs of our ancestors, together with their helmets and corslets of steel. It was the same spirit that swelled with faith and enthusiasm the sails of those humble caravels, before which new worlds started into life from the bosom of the deep;—the same that, independent of party spirit, and espousing all causes with the same faith and devotion, shone in later times among the warriors of Henry IV., or the cavaliers of Charles I. It was the same spirit that breathed its inspiration into the bosom of Gustavus Vasa, the same that sanctified the rights of Maria Theresa in the eyes of the Hungarian nobility. The martyrs of the Reformation and the Jesuits of the earliest missions were warmed by the same flame; to the same spirit we owe the fairest names shining through the horrors of the French revolution—Bailly, La Roche-Jacquelin, Madame Roland, and Charlotte

Corday. It is the same that we have seen agonising on the field of Warsaw, and at the foot of the scaffolds of Turin and Modena.

The spirit of chivalry is not dead. If its office was to fight until the reign of peace and justice should come—if its mission was to combat all violence, and redress all wrongs, Heaven knows that mission is not yet accomplished; and woe to us if the sword of chivalry were too soon definitively laid aside—woe to the warriors of Poland, and the martyrs of Italy—woe to all that is generous and pure, that is enthusiastic and liberal—to the flame of religion and the charity of patriotism—to the charms of poetry and the love of woman!

Thus the feudal and monarchic institutions, which the Gothic, Lombard, and Frankish conquerors had brought upon Italy, were early at war against the democratic and aristocratic orders of ancient Rome, which the popular element in the Italian republics endeavoured to revive. Christianity, which was providentially sent to conciliate all hostile principles, owing to the abuse of human perversity, became a new source of ambition and discord, of intolerance and oppression.

From such elements, however, even from the jarring and clashing of such opposite

elements, the new social order was to proceed in Italy as well as in all the rest of Europe; and things were so providentially disposed that neither could Roman policy and ancient learning have been withdrawn from utter ruin, even by the new religion, without the material element of northern strength; nor could the brute force of the North have been softened even by Christianity, unless enlightened by contact with Roman refinement.

Thus, in the body politic that resulted from the chaos of the Middle Ages, Rome gave the intelligence, Germany furnished the arm, and the Christian religion formed the heart; and chivalry, the result of these three components, the representative of these three moral agents, was, under different disguises and appellations, the soul and mover of modern societies.

But we have outlived the work of the Middle Ages. The edifice of our forefathers, that composite of all orders of Roman and Gothic architecture, lay only a few years ago under our feet nearly a heap of ruins, and deluded nations exulted in the hope of its final demolition. The civil and sacred institutions of Europe were undergoing the slow and melancholy process of a lingering autumn; the last events of the French revolution were the north

wind that was, at one blast, to hurry the work of desolation, and let in the horrors of winter.

But is then all the noble spirit of the Middle Ages equally prostrate and low? Is it so, is it desirable that it should be so?—The strokes of hasty innovators have been incessantly aimed against that stately fabric of our forefathers. But their civil and religious institutions seem to partake of the solidity of their gothic buildings, and to defy all the efforts of a restless posterity. In all their far-sighted conceptions they seemed constantly occupied with the future, all their works were intended for endless duration.—A powerful reaction in favour of the Middle Ages has taken place at least in the North of Europe, ever since the first abating of revolutionary fury; but in Italy the imperious want of political existence, a general state of uneasiness and exasperation, is of necessity, bringing the noblest minds into an undiscerning hostility against the past. May the people of that country, if ever Providence call them to reconstitute their social order, experience how much more difficult it is to rebuild than to destroy; may they find in their patriotism a worthy substitute for chivalrous enthusiasm, in their Catholicism a basis for a more sound and enlightened Christianity!—

CHAPTER III.

SOURCES AND ELEMENTS OF THE REVIVAL OF LEARNING.

Decline of Roman literature—Influence of Italy over the Northern invaders—Theodoric—Charlemagne—Universities—Law-schools—Bologna—Medical school of Salerno—History—Modern languages—Italian language and dialects—Digression on the Arabians—Provençal poetry—Chivalrous romances—Earliest Italian poetry.

WHETHER we may be bent on levelling to the ground the last remnants of the edifice of the Middle Ages, or whether we look upon them with religious wonder and reverence, the duty of well studying the institutions and well understanding the spirit of that era is equally incumbent upon us.—The most rigid conservative no less than the most radical reformer must be equally acquainted with all the complex working of a system of which the one is willing to hold up even the most pernicious abuses, the other would demolish even the most

salutary principles. To take a superficial view of the present state of society, without ascending to its remotest causes would unavoidably lead, as it but too often did, on the one side to obstinacy and superstition, on the other to rashness and presumption.

Now the history of that as well as of every other period is fully written, its very image is indelibly printed in its literary productions. Rude and barbarous as the literature of the Middle Ages may be said to be, it is still an original and genuine emanation; and the less it is indebted to the works of a more refined antiquity for its external adornments the more intimately and essentially does it belong to that time. The more eminently does it stand as its representative.

The history of literature in the Middle Ages must also have its beginning in Italy. The gifted climate of that country received the last faint glimmer of the lingering twilight of that long night of barbarism, and was greeted by the first beams of sunrise. The happy success of her long struggles for freedom had fitted her for her mission. The air of liberty fanned over the half-quenched embers of ancient lore, and raised them into a blaze that was to drive the phantoms of error from

pole to pole. It will therefore be a subject of the highest importance to take a view of the state of literature in Italy, in that age of transition; to inquire by what means that country was enabled to take the lead in that work of regeneration; how far she contributed to the revival of the ancient classics; how much she was indebted to the living models of the Arabians and Provençals, and what claim Italian genius may have to originality.

We count the fading stars twinkling in the cloudy firmament of the Middle Ages, ere the glorious day dawn in which they will be dimmed and drowned in a torrent of light.

The writings of Greece and the writings of Rome form but one literature in two distinct languages. Literature in Rome, an idle luxury imported from Greece among the thousand articles of eastern corruption, with irreparable detriment to all that remained of national lore among the Etruscans and Oscians, never aimed at original conceptions. The Roman patricians sought in Grecian philosophy a refuge against the self upbraiding consciousness of their own degradation; they sought in Grecian eloquence the ornament that might render their flattery more acceptable to the ears of their masters—a refined but aimless

literature, such as could only become a tottering state and a society verging to its dissolution, never exercising any vital influence; never belonging, never appealing, to the feelings of the people, it could be expected to have only a precarious and ephemeral duration.

In fact, as soon as the gay and amiable parasites of the pampered Augustus were scared from court by the frowns of Tiberius, arts and letters were mute. A long and rapid decline ensued, interrupted only by the silver ages of Trajan and his successors; but by degrees even the power of copying had failed, and the remaining crowd of grammarians and rhetoricians sank lower and lower, until they had lost all taste and feeling, as their predecessors had forfeited all genius.

Whilst the literature of the Roman world was thus falling into ruin in consequence of its organic infirmity, the earliest fathers of the church hastened its downfall by their indiscriminate proscription of all Pagan authors, in whom they apprehended teachers of idolatry and immorality. Lifted to the most glowing inspirations by the visions of their ascetic life, drawing from the deep well of the Scriptures, strengthened and warmed by their endless controversies against the frequent attacks of

heresy, those pious divines could have perhaps given rise to a new and more enthusiastic style of writing, if, instead of preserving the Latin language in its purity, they had not, by their rigid contempt of all literary ornaments, dried up the sources of life, and, by inflaming the blind zeal of bigoted monarchs, they had not declared an unrelenting war against the last remains of profane literature, with an ardour and diligence that left hardly any thing to be demolished by the barbarians themselves.

The reputation of these barbarians, of whom the monks of the Middle Ages had left us so horrid a picture, has been of late partly redintegrated by the sympathy of some of our contemporaries, who, by more liberal views and more accurate researches, have thrown new light upon that arduous subject.

The highest praises for moderation, for comparative refinement and culture, have been especially bestowed upon those among the northern invaders who first settled in Italy—the Ostrogoths of Theodoric. The native ferocity of that nation had been considerably subdued by the softening influence of Christianity previous to their invasion. They lived under the compact of wise and equitable laws, they indulged in no wanton destructiveness,

they felt all the importance of science and letters, and held their cultivators in veneration and honour. Theodoric, their leader and hero, a generous monarch, but, as it has been asserted, an illiterate barbarian, at the epoch of his arrival in Italy, called around his throne Cassiodorus, Boethius, and all such men as public report designated as the luminaries of the age.* His cruel treatment of Boethius indeed—of that noble genius whom the ancients and moderns equally claim as their own—could induce us to believe that, even after his long sojourn in Italy, the Northern monarch had not entirely laid down the last scales of his Gothic barbarism. Yet the gratitude of after generations points to him as one of the most liberal benefactors of mankind, endowed with a mind widely superior to his age. But it would be, perhaps, not very far from truth to state, that if the Goths ever displayed any taste for letters or arts, it was principally when they were brought into contact with the natives of Italy; and that even the style of architecture

* Cassiodorus born A.D. 497, died 575. Principal work, "De rebus gestis Gothorum."—Boethius born at Rome, 455; Consul, 487. In favour with Odoacer and Theodoric. At war with the last for religious opinions. Imprisoned and beheaded, 526. "De Consolatione Philosophiæ."

that bears their name, if it were indeed of Gothic origin—a point on which modern critics will not soon agree—never assumed its character of daring grandeur and majesty, until northern genius was roused to a noble emulation by the aspect of the lofty buildings of Rome.

The Lombards had the reputation of being a more barbarous race than their Gothic predecessors. Indeed the age of darkness has been dated in Italy from the epoch of the invasion of Alboin. Yet, as the host of that conqueror did not subdue the whole country, Italy must still have remained the repository of the ancient treasures of learning, and classic manuscripts continued to be sheltered under the shade of her cloisters. In progress of time, Authar having embraced the Catholic religion, and Lütprand tempered the Lombard statutes by the gradual adoption of the Roman laws, even the Lombards were allured by the charms of a long security to bestow their thoughts upon the cultivation of those arts of peace which they had spurned hitherto, and despised as a servile and unmanly occupation to be abandoned to the degenerate Latins.

Thus, at the epoch of the conquest of Charlemagne, the men that most virtually aided and

directed the efforts of that monarch for the restoration of learning, such as Paul Warnefrid, Peter of Pisa, Theodulph, and others, were not only natives of Italy, but belonged to the race of the Lombard invaders.*

In the case of Charlemagne we have another illustration of that ancient saying, "Victa terra victores domuit." It was always Italy subduing her conquerors. Like Theodoric, Charlemagne was little better than a rude and crafty warrior, when the pope laid open before him the road of the Alps. But the sight of the many monuments, the intercourse with Alcuin, an Englishman by birth, but whom he first met in Italy, and with the other illustrious Lombards we have mentioned, and finally the very air of Italy, inspired him with a desire of leaving of himself a nobler record than any of his most signal victories could have sent to posterity. All seminaries of learning, which were in a state of utter annihilation before him, received new life from his powerful will.

* Paulus Warnefridus, or Paulus Diaconus, born in Friuli, towards the beginning of the eighth century, died 799. "De rebus gestis Longobardorum," etc.—Theodulph invited to the court of Charlemagne, 781, created Bishop of Orleans. Accused of high treason, under Louis le debonnaire, 818. Died in exile, 821.—Peter of Pisa flourished at Pavia, 774.

If the universities of Paris and Bologna, and the medical school of Salerno, are not indebted to his patronage for their origin or increment, as it had been generally supposed, there is no doubt at least that the first start towards the universal diffusion of knowledge through the institution of public schools is principally due to him.

But the enterprise of rescuing Europe from barbarism was too far above the means of Charlemagne himself. All relapsed into utter confusion during the long wars of his successors, and ignorance laid its roots deeper and deeper down to the year 1000, which has been considered by many writers as the lowest extreme of degradation, the nadir of the human intelligence.

The schools established by Charlemagne, and those that were opened and flourished in great number under some of the Carlovingian princes, did not for a long period—not even after the beginning of the eleventh century, not indeed until the brightest era of the Italian republics—operate much towards the accomplishment of the redeeming mission for which they were instituted. The brightest geniuses that were called to preside over them launched into a bewildering waste, led astray by unprofitable

chimeras, and were soon lost in a maze of error more tenebrous and deplorable by far than the utter ignorance they laboured to dissipate.

That mystic and polemic divinity which had brought all learning to a close at the epoch of the decline of ancient literature, after lurking faint and sickly among the cloisters, by the dim lamp of dreaming solitaries, had been recently revived in the schools, which had been especially opened for the benefit of the clergy; and, allied to the most abstruse methods of the scholastic philosophy of Aristotle, and of his Arabian commentators, gave rise to that confusion of wild theories and absurd hypotheses, of cavils and sophistry, of vicious interminable controversies, by which that giddy age so wonderfully succeeded in wrapping up and entangling and eclipsing all truth.

Two orders of monks, drawn up in hostile array, headed by their *seraphic* and *angelical* doctors, cased in their panoply of "ipse dixit" authority, skilled in all the tricks and resources of dialectical subtlety, caused their Gothic halls and cathedrals to resound with the heavy thunders of their envenomed disputes. The gaping crowd stared and wondered, wrapt in stupendous amazement at the magic sound of

the almost unknown language of the combatants, edified by the vehemence of their invectives and diatribes, and looking upon them with awe and perplexity, not unmixed with mistrust and contempt, until their passions catching fire by the heat of the fray, they would occasionally enter as mediators in the contest, and by their summary justice settle all differences, enforcing orthodoxy by the irresistible arguments of fagot and stake. For the charge of heresy was the last weapon resorted to, to bring down a strong-headed antagonist, and it never failed to awaken the sympathy of the blood-thirsty enthusiasm of the people.

The hideous demons of superstition and fanaticism could not without a long struggle be driven off the field, of which they had for so many years held an undisputed possession.

Their ill-directed ardour not unfrequently interfered with the real progress of those scholars in the path of knowledge, their ambition for a universal scholarship, when the relations between the different sciences were more imperfectly defined, and the means of acquisition were less within reach, engaged them in a labyrinth of disorderly pursuits, where they were exhausted and lost before

coming to any profitable results. Science was to them an unfathomable ocean, of which they vainly strove to sound the depths, while their only object should have been to sail across it.

Every branch of learning was, in that early revival, involved in a dark veil of mystery; all its speculations were blended with the secret power of magic,—acknowledged and obeyed the influence of supernatural agents. Astronomy strained every nerve to read the language of the stars, and boasted to unravel the arcana of the future before terrified mortals;—chemistry dazzled the eyes of the multitude by the juggleries of its infant discoveries, and dived deeply into the dark magistery of alchemy, of whose tantalising hopes and golden visions the juggler himself was the first dupe;—medicine dealt in aphorisms and amulets, and endeavoured to strengthen the speciousness of Grecian theory by the practice of Arabian quackery.

At every step, wherever we turn, a sense of pity and sadness steals over us as we muse on the long wandering of the human mind in past ages, and far from finding courage to laugh at the absurdities of those holy divines, of those famous empirics, or at the extravagances of the title-pages of their huge folios—all we find

leisure to read of their works—we bend our brows with despondency, and feel tempted to doubt whether indeed we are treading on a surer path, whether posterity will not equally laugh at our pursuits, and whether we are to be thankful to Heaven for the gift of this ever-straying reason of ours.

Italy was the first to recover from that universal aberration of the human mind, or rather never plunged into it so deeply as the Transalpine nations had done. Italian scholars were, indeed, called in all times to the direction of the theological schools of England and France, and few divines were ever raised into a greater renown than either Thomas Aquinas, or Lanfranc and Anselm, the founders of the school du Bec, in Normandy, who were called by William the Conqueror and his successors to fill the see of Canterbury, and played so conspicuous a part in the contests between the English monarchs and the pontiffs of Rome. The school of Normandy flourished under the auspices of those prelates long before the attention of all Europe was attracted by the superior genius, by the bold mind, and wild, disorderly career of Abelard, and Peter Lombard, his disciple, the two great luminaries of the University of Paris. But no school was opened

in Italy for that polemic theology and scholastic philosophy in which that age so universally delighted, and those among the Italians who aspired to shine in that sphere were obliged to repair to France and England, the fields where those erudite conflicts were fought.*

Whether or not the university of Paris was first founded and chartered by Charlemagne, and that of Oxford can date its primordial institution from Alfred, we shall not venture to dispute; but it seems doubtless that some of the Italian schools, notwithstanding long and frequent interruptions, were never considered as definitively closed during all the stormy period of the Middle Ages; and some of them, Bologna and Salerno especially, can boast of the remotest antiquity. Nor—even if the Italian universities were to yield the vaunt

* Thomas Aquinas, the greatest of Italian divines in the Middle Ages, called the angelical doctor, born in Aquino 1224; created D.D. at Paris 1253; died 1274; canonized by John XXII.; first edition of his works, Venice, 1490.—Lanfranc, born at Pavia, 1005; studied at Bologna; retired to the Abbey of Bec, 1041; founded a school of divinity 1044; elected archbishop of Canterbury 1070; died 1089.—Anselm, born at Aosta, 1033; pupil and successor of Lanfranc, archbishop of Canterbury, 1093; banished, 1097; recalled, 1100; died 1109.—Peter Lombard, born at Novara; Bishop of Paris, 1160; died 1164.

of priority of time—would ever the topics treated of in the French and English seminaries have had any influence upon the progress of society, if the law-schools of the Lombard and Tuscan republics had not turned men's minds on subjects of more vital importance, and extended the influence of learning upon the body politic of the state.

Bologna, the noblest and oldest of those institutions, from immemorial time the mother of learning, had been improved and augmented by the co-operating munificence of all emperors and popes. That city had seen the day in which ten, and even thirteen thousand students crowded her halls—when the most profound scholars of Europe walked beneath her porticoes—when the degrees and insignia of doctors, of bachelors, and other academical titles and ceremonies, were first introduced, to be successively adopted by all the modern universities. It was there that Werner, or Irnerius, a native of that city, a man of wide-spread reputation and of the loftiest character, honoured and favoured by Henry V. of Germany, and by the high-spirited Countess Matilda, towards the beginning of the twelfth century opened the first law-school, and began to read and expound the Pandects of Justinian,

which had fallen into disuse, or had been utterly lost, according to an ancient report, and were rescued from oblivion by the Pisans at the epoch of the taking of Amalfi. Law-schools were soon opened throughout all Lombardy and Tuscany.*

The study of law, so consistent with the ardour of these new republicans, for the better understanding and defining of their civil and political rights and duties, soon absorbed all capacities. The Transalpine nations followed the example of Italy. There were soon law-schools throughout Europe, modelled after that of Bologna, and the study of the Lombard and Tuscan municipal constitutions gradually roused the European communities to break the bonds of feudalism.†

Meanwhile the diffusion of legal studies in Italy altered the whole face of society. All magistrates were, from that time, principally furnished by the universities, as they had been previously chosen from the army. Men of learning sat at the helm of public affairs at home, and were intrusted with the most diffi-

* Irnerius born at Bologna; professor of law in that university, 1128; died, 1150.

† Vacarius, a Lombard by birth and disciple of Irnerius, the first teacher of law in England; flourished, 1160.

cult missions abroad. Venice, Pisa, and Genoa gave out their "Consolato del Mare," the first model of a maritime code, limiting the rights of nations at sea. From that time the Italians laid the first basis of European diplomacy.

Thus when the great national contest had been fought on the field of Legnano, and the cities of the Lombard league sent their legates to treat as equals with Frederic Barbarossa for the peace of Constance, it was with a start of indefinable emotion that the world beheld a few dark-eyed, long-robed, Italian doctors, the disciples of Irnerius, advancing with a calm, secure countenance, among the iron-clad barons of the German court, as if announcing that the iron age was over, and arms were henceforth destined to give way before the gown.

Meanwhile, in the south, the medical school of Salerno, whose origin is lost among the remotest traditions of age, had been, towards the year 1060, reorganised by the arduous cares of Constantine Africanus, and raised to its highest splendour and dignity. This extraordinary man, a native of Carthage, a type of the most remarkable scholars of the Middle Ages, had travelled thirty-nine years to Egypt, to India, to Persia, to the remotest provinces of the known world, in pursuit of knowledge, and,

according to the encyclopædical comprehensiveness of the studies of that epoch, had embraced with one vast intelligence, all that could and could not be known; could read and write all dead and living languages; had conversed and discussed with the highest standing literary characters of the East and West, and beaten them at their own weapons in private and public debates; had searched, collected, and translated all the most precious treasures of Greek, Chaldean, and Arabic lore; and after having been tossed about from land to land, and persecuted and banished as heretic and sorcerer, he found a shelter from envy and ignorance at the court of the Normans of Apulia, under whose patronage he resided in Salerno; until deeming even that school an unsafe harbour against the tempests of life, he retired to the monastery of Monte-Cassino, where he never lost sight of his favourite pursuits to the very close of his days.

Such were the Italian universities of the Middle Ages, which arising, for the most part, from the elements of national liberty, were destined to struggle against all the following vicissitudes of the country, and continued, long after the abolition of democracy, to present the strange anomaly of a republican institution flourishing under monarchical states.

The final day seems now to have come for them also.

The Italian universities, venerable from their primogenial antiquity, relying on their indisputable claims to the gratitude of mankind, after having contrived to thrive under the suspicious jealousy of domestic despotism, after withstanding the wanton attacks of foreign oppressors, baffling and unveiling the wily arts of jesuitism, and breaking asunder the fetters of the inquisition, seemed to have been spared through so long a course of generations, only to be now involved in the great national contest, to which all that belongs to the past is rapidly falling a prey.

The final day has come for the Italian universities; their august halls and vestibules, haunted by silence and loneliness, reared up in the most sequestered quarters of old, solemn, dilapidated towns, such as Pavia, Padua, and Pisa, could not escape the watchfulness of the Italian rulers in the merciless war that they have miserably waged against thought. Suspected as the nurseries of rebellion, impeached of materialism, of Romanticism, and, what is worse, Carbonarism; divided and fettered, as those of Padua and Parma, or given up to the rage of the Jesuits, as those of Naples and

Modena; or utterly suppressed, as those of Turin and Genoa; their professors, Libri, Melloni, Nobili, Orioli and a hundred of the most eminent sent into exile, to become the pride and ornament of foreign universities; those Italian seminaries have long been at the mercy of enemies who seemed to cherish in their heart the fond hope of driving back the spirit of the age, by hushing the tongue of the schoolmaster, or pulling down the walls of the schoolhouse.

While the law-schools of the Lombard and Tuscan republics, by turning the lucubrations of the learned towards objects of public usefulness, kindled a new ardour for study, and placed it within reach of the multitude, whilst the commerce of the maritime cities with the Eastern empire and the Moors of Spain laid open before the enterprising curiosity of Italian scholars the sanctuaries of Greek and Arabic science; and men of profound erudition, especially from Lombardy, set out on long pilgrimages in quest of parchments and manuscripts; Venice and Genoa, as early as the beginning of the twelfth century, and subsequently every free community, began to intrust their most conspicuous citizens and magistrates with the compilation of national me-

morials; and history, thus taken from the silence and barrenness of the convents, emancipated from the superstitions and absurdities of monkish legends and chronicles, began to exercise its functions as treasurer of the past, and monitor of the future; and if we remember that those enlightened democracies made the first attempts towards establishing systems of general policy and diplomacy, and their hardy navigators brought home information from the remotest regions, we shall no longer be at a loss to understand why the annals preserved in the archives of the Italian cities have at all times been revered as universal records of undisputed authenticity.

All these noble efforts, however, would have failed to bring about any general result, without a great revolution, that had been matured long before Europe had given any symptom of a revival of learning: we mean the extinction of the Latin, and the rise of the modern languages. The Latin of the schools, always coarse and uncouth as it was, on account of the utter disregard of the scholars of the Middle Ages for all ornaments of style, and of the prejudices still extant against the profane authors of classic Latinity, was no longer the language of the people, and could, therefore, no longer

serve as a direct organ of communication between the learned and the active part of society —between the school and the state.

From the earliest contact of the northern nations with the natives of the Roman dominions, the Latin language, which had, perhaps, never been pure, even in Italy, especially in Cisalpine Gaul, underwent a rapid and progressive corruption. This popular dialect, which had for a long time insensibly diverged from the standard language of Rome, was finally recognised as a new dialect, and distinguished under the name of "Romance" language, which was equally spoken in all the formerly Roman provinces of Italy, Gaul, and Spain, and became the common source of the modern languages of the south of Europe. This Romance language arose simultaneously and from the same circumstance in all the above-mentioned provinces, and was for a long time spoken and understood as one and the same language; but the local peculiarities which it derived from its primitive sources, in progress of time traced the limits of different and distinct dialects, and the new languages of Languedoc and Languedoil, or of Provence and Northern France, as well as those of Spain and Italy, arose.

The Italian language appears to have been formed, or rather, perhaps, to have been written, later than any of the southern tongues of Europe; not, indeed, because the corruption of the Latin may have taken place any later, for the formation of the Romance language in northern Italy, must have occurred during the long period of the Lombard dominion; but because the Latin lingered with more fondness in the land where it had sprung, where it found a more lasting abode in the convents, in the schools, in the Liturgy of a church which had its chief seat in Italy.

The Italian languished for a long period of ages, a formless and lawless dialect, more and more spurned and neglected, as an impure bastard, by the scholars of the Middle Ages, in proportion as the revival of learning naturally led them back to the dead languages; but when the want of a literature of life called the living tongues into action, when the first examples of Romance poetry were set by the Provençal Troubadours, the Italian was found to have been silently matured by the secret working of the people, and, hiding its infancy amid the darkness of ages, it seemed to arise full-grown and armed, like Minerva, from the head of its great father, Dante.

The late appearance of a standard language in Italy, and the long neglect in which the vernacular dialect was suffered to lie from its earliest origin, gave rise, perhaps, to that endless variety of vulgar idioms which strike the stranger at every step in his progress through the country.

Those peculiarities proceeded from the original varieties of language of the many Teutonic tribes that settled in the different districts, and were afterwards preserved and cherished with all the warmth of municipal jealousies, when, by the wars of the republics, all alliance and friendly intercourse between the hostile cities had come to an end. It cannot be doubted, at least, that, even in our days, the popular language exhibits more of the natural softness and melody of the mother tongue at Rome, at Venice, in the south of Tuscany, and wherever the native race escaped foreign mixture to any considerable degree; while the dialects of the Vale of the Po, in Lombardy, Piedmont, and Romagna, betray their barbaric descent by their harshness and rudeness, no less than by their strength and conciseness, by their sharp nasal Gallic accent, by their Gothic clash of diphthongs and consonants; and while the mixture of Greek and Saracen

are still to be recognised in the lively and argute dialects of the Calabrias, and in the deep guttural accent of the islanders.

The abuse of the vulgar dialects has ever been, and will be for a long time in Italy, one of the most serious obstacles against the diffusion of national education. Not only are those patois absolutely unintelligible out of the narrow limits in which they are spoken, but even Italian itself is not generally well understood among the uneducated people, so that the lowest classes in Italy have no common means of communication.

The guilty neglect of the national language, in private and public schools, and the deplorable infatuation for preserving those provincial idioms, with all the narrow-mindedness of municipal prejudices, render it difficult even for the highest circles to converse fluently and correctly in that sweet language that forms the delight and admiration of foreigners; and it is not unfrequent to find men of the loftiest genius, who, by consigning the sublime inspirations of poetry to the medium of those vernacular tongues, unconsciously minister to the blind predilections of the people, which, if they understood the true interests of their country, they would join to exterminate.

The historians of the progress of the human mind in the Middle Ages are at a loss to determine by what slow process the Romance dialects of south Europe were, by the influence of a general refinement of manners, gradually dressed in all the charms of poetry, and the ever-varying idioms of the people were finally forced to recognise the sovereign sway of a standard literature.

Following especially the path traced by Ginguené and Sismondi, though we are aware that the great majority of English and German critics have altogether rejected their theories, we shall assign to Arabian influence the merit of having given the first start to modern literature in Spain, France, and Italy.

As soon as, led by the enthusiasm of the successors of the prophet, those wonderful rovers of the desert, "having"—to adopt their own oriental style—"taken the four opposite directions of the wind, spread over the earth with a valour of which the report alone secured success; having routed more enemies than they could count, and subdued more land than they could travel through," they turned their minds to the arts of peace, with the same restless alacrity which had guided them in their warlike exploits.

Arrived in contact with the Greeks in their conquest of Egypt, they wrenched from them the torch of learning which fluttered languidly in their hands, and under the mighty patronage of the great monarchs of the house of Abbas, especially Haroon-el-Rasheed and his august successor, they proceeded to the diffusion of literary institutions of all kinds, with an ardour and diligence which has never, before or after, been equalled.

How far modern science is indebted to them for their discoveries in medicine, in astronomy, in all philosophical studies, for their improvements in the science of navigation, in all the useful arts of war and peace, we need not to enumerate. The light of science and letters which they had first kindled in the East, followed them to the whole of their vast conquests; and their schools and libraries were especially numerous and copious in Spain, where, under the immediate favour of the dynasty of the Ommyades, the Moslem races reached, perhaps, the highest point of moral and intellectual attainment.

It is worthy of remark, that Sicily did not obtain from the Saracenic invasion all the advantages in respect to literary institutions, that were derived by Spain from the Moors. The

Saracens of Sicily found no rest in their adopted home. Their continual piratical excursions allowed them no leisure for study. Still the medical school at Salerno would never have risen to so eminent a rank without the direction of African and Arabian scholars; and we may be permitted to believe that the Saracens, who were spared in the Norman conquest, and flourished at the court of Frederic the Second and Manfred his son, considerably added to the renown that Sicily enjoyed in the infancy of Italian literature.

But while the basis of their philosophical studies lay principally in the works of the Greeks, whose manuscripts they collected and translated with unwearied attention, their poetry possessed all the vivid colours of its oriental descent. From immemorial time these wandering tribes possessed a native poetry, shining with the brilliancy, fragrant with all the perfumes of the landscapes of Yemen. Poetry and religion had, among these people, been always closely connected, and the creations of their poets were hung around their temples, as if in consecration to the divinity from which they emanated. Eastern imagination looked with indifference to the pure and sober inspirations of the Greeks. They had no translations

or imitations of any of the classic poets of the language of Homer. Hence their style was entirely their own. That delicacy of sentiment that tendency to luxuriance and extravagance, that mysticism and transcendentalism, which characterises those writings in modern literature that are known under the name of romantic, and for which we find no models among the writings of Greece or Rome, seem certainly to proceed from the influence of Arabian and Persian poetry. The rhyme, and, to a great extent, the rhythm and measure of Provençal, French, and Italian verses, and the forms of sonnets, of songs, and other metrical compositions, have been by many writers, though not without strong opposition, considered as evident proofs of their eastern derivation.

But our opinion would, perhaps, meet with more universal suffrages, if we should state that, if not the style and model, the spirit of poetry at least was communicated to the west of Europe by the Arabians.

Towards the middle of the eleventh century, the Moorish dominion in Spain gave signs of imminent dissolution. The dissensions of the petty sovereigns who succeeded the wise dynasty of the Ommyades, and their persecutions against the few Christians who had

Social and private life seemed animated with hitherto continued unmolested among them, drove to the Christian courts of Catalonia and Aragon a number of illustrious exiles, who carried with them the sciences and arts, the tales and poems of the East.

We have reason to believe that those Catalonian and Aragonese monarchies were then amongst the most refined in Christendom. By the union of Catalonia and Provence, in the year 1092, the glory of a superior cultivation passed from Spain to the court of Provence. That court enjoyed, in that epoch, the blessings of a long peace, during which it became the mirror of the chivalry of Europe. All that France had most fair and gallant repaired to the tournaments and courts of love, with which the guests of those liberal princes were continually entertained.

It was there that the poetry of the Troubadours arose. William Duke of Guienne, the first bard mentioned in the history of the gay science, flourished about the year 1096. But the golden age of Provençal poetry only began towards the middle of the twelfth century, and lasted till about the close of the thirteenth.

More lately, the long wars of Castile against the Moors of Spain, the Crusades, the acqui-

sition of a part of Languedoc by the English, and such other political commotions, tended to associate the knights of all Europe in common adventures. Thus the poetry of the Troubadours became the common inheritance of all Christendom, and the Provençal was soon the common language of chivalry, love, and gallantry.

The differences of the romance dialects being not yet clearly defined, the earliest Spanish poetry may be considered to have been soon melted into the Provençal, and this to have spread throughout all the courts of Europe. The professors of the gay science were greeted and honoured wherever they passed, and the high credit to which they rose, induced knights and ladies of the highest standing to join their ranks. Some talent for poetry was considered as the most brilliant appendage of chivalrous valour. Frederic Barbarossa, and Richard of England, the lords of Poitou, of Orange, of Auvergne, and Montferrat—and in later times, Alphonso II. and Peter III. of Aragon,—aspired to the title of Troubadours in the halls of their castles, as they sighed after the glory of private knights in the field. The ladies entered the lists of the melodious *tensons* of their bards, and learned to answer in verses the metrical effusions which their charms had inspired.

the air of song; romance of life closely followed the romance of poetry. A spirit of wanton gallantry had relaxed all bonds of morality. False ideas of honour, of loyalty, and devotion, seemed to sanction the most transcendent absurdities. It was a blessed age of roving and pilgrimages, of wooing and worshipping, of dancing and skirmishing, of sinning and confessing. A stripling of a page, a varlet, but ennobled by his proficiency in the gay science, dared to aspire, and not unsuccessfully, to the smiles of a princess, who sat successively on the thrones of England and France; another raved all his lifetime after dreams of grandeur and majesty, fancying himself at the eve of exchanging his poetical laurel for the prouder decoration of an imperial diadem.

The extremes of tragic and comic, of sublime and ludicrous, never were brought into a closer contact. It was now a king, prisoner in a dark tower, and a faithful minstrel travelling in quest of him, across mountains and along rivers, and the sound of his harp reaching the ears of the monarch like a ray of hope beaming through the darkness of his lonely confinement. Now, a love-sick king's son drooping with a hopeless passion for an eastern princess,

whose dark-blue eyes he had never beheld, starting at last for Palestine, preceded by a hundred sonnets, borne on the wings of the zephyrs, and arriving only to die at the feet of his mistress in a trance of joy at the sight of her charms. Now, a dying palmer, despatching his shield-bearer from Syria, charged with the awful mission of conveying his heart to the lady of his thoughts; and the trusty messenger roaming about the forbidden abode of the fair one, surprised and stabbed by the watchful jealousy of a villanous husband, and the precious relics of the crusader dressed in an awful mess, and eaten at supper by the unconscious lady.

Such were the ideal images of chivalrous poetry, such the real incidents of chivalrous life. But as in process of time the poetry of the Troubadours passed from its original birth-place of Provence to the courts of the north and south, it began to appear dressed in all the different languages, and modified by the different tastes of the various nations to which it emigrated.

There had been in the north, since the epoch of the earliest invasions, among the Gothic and Scandinavian tribes, a national poetry, the last traditions of which were not yet ut-

terly forgotten. The efforts of the modern Germans to revive the ancient poetry of their forefathers have brought into public notice large fragments of poems, the origin of some of which, according to the statement of their most sanguine critics, ascends as far back as the days of Theodoric and Attila. But without taking upon ourselves to adopt or to reject the antiquity of the Niebelungen Lied and the Helden-Buch, it would have been easy to conjecture that those warlike tribes could not have been led from one end to the other of the continent without the excitement of heart-cheering songs, and that poetry and romance there must certainly have been in the entrancing joy of triumph with which they hailed a new land as the appanage of their children; in those long rows of tents and chariots that carried their wives after them, to make their hearts beat with redoubled anxiety in the hour of danger. The sweet clime of the south, however, and the enjoyment of domestic habits, soon buried those songs in oblivion in France and Italy; and the warlike verses of the German tribes died away with the sounds of their trumpets and the neighing of their steeds, when the conquest was secured, and the warrior reposed under the shade of his laurels.

But among the Scandinavian pirates, who under the names of Danes and Normans infested the coasts of England and France, and ended by possessing themselves of part of both countries, the traditions of their national poetry must have been preserved for a period of longer duration, and their poetical taste must have been communicated to the provinces of Northern France, with whose romance dialects the native tongue of the Norman conquerors was soon blended. The daring adventurers that followed William I. to the conquest of England had not at least lost sight of the minstrelsy of their ancestors, if we are to believe that their spirits were wound up to the highest combative mood by the harp of Taillefer, singing the deeds of the brave Roland on the eve of the grand strife that submitted this fair island to the valour of their lances.

Nevertheless, whatever might have been the poetry and the language of these Northmen, long after their first settlement in Normandy; whatever we may believe of the assertion that the Romance Walloon of Northern France was written in verse, and formed a distinct dialect, long before the first crusade; and that, for instance, the sweet strains by which the

high-souled Héloïse was won, and her name raised to its romantic celebrity, were dictated in that language; it may perhaps be easily ascertained that the poetry of the Troubadours, and in consequence the Provençal language, were still cultivated in the North of France and in England in the days of Philip Augustus and Richard Cœur-de-Lion; so that those chivalrous romances, that are thought to have originated in Normandy or Brittany, and which are especially known under the name of Poetry of the Trouvères, must be considered to have arisen, or at least to have flourished, in an epoch posterior to the golden age of Provençal poetry, and to have therefore received from it that warmth and animation which they could not have derived from their German and Scandinavian origin.

Those chivalrous tales, in fact, from the earliest specimens of King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table, down to the livelier Spanish conceptions of the Amadises, and the French legends of the Paladins of Charlemagne, seemed to gain new charm and interest in proportion as they basked in the rays of a southern sun; so that, in the same measure as they belong to a more modern epoch, they lose more and more of their affinity

to the heroic poems of the Gothic and Scandinavian races, to whose remote derivation they are generally traced.

The influence of Arabian taste had tinged them with more lively hues, and while the type, the frame of those romances, was essentially of northern cast, the spirit which animated them was evidently of eastern emanation. Those ancient German epopées described other manners and other feelings. The German bards were impressed with the gloom of their sky, with the dreariness of their northern wastes; their fancies were saddened by the awful rites of their religion, by the truculent traditions of their mythology. The austerity of their morals excluded all effusions of love and gallantry: woman was revered with devotion and deference, but not with the ardent transport of chivalrous passion. Chivalry, by its origin a German institution, was not, however, perfected until the days of the crusades, when northern valour was allied to the brilliant enthusiasm, to the splendour and courtesy, of eastern refinement.

The wars of Spain and Palestine extended the field of chivalrous adventures. The unexplored regions of the East lay open before the boldness of European enterprise, and the

dreams of the poet peopled them with phantoms and monsters, which, however, fell short of human credulity. Christian princes were made to ride to India and China, and turbaned heroes to roam through the forests of England and Germany. Love, glowing with all the fire that consumes southern and eastern bosoms, usurped the highest place in chivalrous life. Fays and enchantresses, no longer the mischievous weird hags of the North, but kind and benevolent beings, after the stamp of eastern genii, inhabitants of golden palaces and enchanted gardens, gifted with immortal beauty and happiness, with no other spell than the charms of their lovelines, welcomed the weary knight, and nestled him in their bosoms, enraptured, bewildered by long draughts of blessed forgetfulness.

It would be hardly possible to doubt that such poetry must early have made its way into Italy. The long residence of the Saracens in Sicily, the commerce that the Italian republics entertained with the Moors, and with the Christian monarchies of Spain, the share they had, in all times, in the warlike and maritime expeditions to Palestine, must have rendered the Arabian, French, and Provençal poetry familiar in Italy. If Lombardy and Tuscany had few

or no courts or castles to which the strolling minstrel could repair for hospitality, his performances were not utterly lost upon the people. The songs and ballads in the Provençal and French languages were not probably unintelligible to Italian ears, and it is most likely there must have been no lack of early attempts at a rude national minstrelsy in the popular dialects.

Unfortunately, in Italy, from the earliest revival of literature, a wide barrier was raised between the learned classes and the people. The Italian scholars erected themselves into a privileged order, and usurped the place of that aristocracy which the republican spirit of the times had demolished. Hence all that originated with the people was left to perish among the people; and while the Italian doctors and scholars, all buried in their classical studies, were scarcely aware that any other language could be spoken but the barbarous Latin of the schools, the earliest specimens of vulgar poetry must have been indiscriminately suffered to wallow disfigured and corrupted among the illiterate multitude, sung by ragged jongleurs and mountebanks, handed down from generation to generation, until they received new life in the archetypal creations of Petrarch, Boccaccio, and Ariosto.

But when at length Italy was, by the sound of the harp of the Troubadours awakened from the deep studies in which she was engulfed; when she began to feel that Latin could no longer be the language of life, and that her rude new dialects could answer the noblest conceptions of the mind, as well as the softest emotions of the heart; when she first came to the bitter conclusion that she had taken the wrong way, and had suffered herself to be outrun by her neighbours, she threw aside for one moment her Justinian and Augustin, and grasping her lyre, that had hung mute by her neck for ten centuries, she rushed into the lists with anxious emulation, and soon assumed her wonted place as ruler and mistress; for the generous matron felt that she was destined to lead the way, and the idea of being left behind in the race of nations is one to which, even now, after such a long schooling of humiliation and vassalage, after the luminous evidences of French, English, and German superiority, she can hardly be reconciled.

The earliest specimens of Italian poetry now in existence belonged to the dispersed aristocracy; and the first attempts appear to have been made in the only court that was left still

standing in that republican land; as such, they were only the echo of the melodies of chivalrous France. The first verses were even written in Provençal, and the name of the heroic Sordello of Mantua, with a few other bards from Venice and Genoa, rank among the highest in the list of Provençal troubadours.* But the first example being finally set by the court of Sicily, Italian poetry arose early in the thirteenth century.

It is not our purpose to give any account of the Italian poets that preceded the age of Dante. Their verses, few, and forgotten even in Italy, might attract the curiosity of the antiquary rather than the interest of the man of taste. Their biography would prove perhaps a more exciting subject; most of them were men of lofty character, and played a conspicuous part in the history of their age.

They seem to rise before us in their old-fashioned costume of cassoc and steel, each one pompously holding forth the manuscript of his

* Sordello, a knight and troubadour, a native of Mantua, whose memoirs are confused with vague and contradictory legends, was born towards the close of the twelfth and flourished towards the middle of the following century; he lived at the court of Provence, and at that of Ezzelino da Romano, whose sister Cunizza, he is supposed to have seduced. He distinguished himself by deeds of valour, and died a violent death.

canzoniere, on which he lays his claims to the consideration of posterity; each one leading by the hand his peerless mistress, blushing at the sound of her praises; all stately forms, dark and solemn, assuming gigantic dimensions through the magnifying medium of the mist of time.

The very first of the number, of whom indeed, as of Faliero in the hall of the Great Council at Venice, nothing can be discerned but a black veil and a name, is Ciullo d'Alcamo, and under his bust are sculptured a few rude stanzas of the first Italian songs we have left. Ciullo remains behind a noble group of Sicilian bards, of judges, knights and notaries, constituting the court of the second Frederic, flourishing half a century after him. Frederic, a bard himself, and an Italian by birth and education, a knight, a scholar, a liberal patron of learning and genius, stands foremost with all the height of his commanding figure, stretching the ample folds of his imperial and royal purple, as if in the attitude of patronage, over his courtiers and minions; like the prince of darkness, hiding under the splendour of his crown the scars left on his forehead by the burnings of the thunders of the Vatican. By his right side are his two

sons, like him, initiated in all the apprenticeships of knighthood and minstrelsy; and by his left the wretched victim of a moment of his inconsiderate wrath, the butt of courtly treason and calumny, his accomplished secretary, Pier delle Vigne, turning towards his lord the hollow sockets whence his eyes were wrenched, and tendering to him the bowstring with which he strangled himself in his dungeon.*

Opposite to the train of the Sicilian monarch, more bold, more distinct, more luminous, may be seen a crowd of republican poets from Lombardy and Tuscany: that one, in the martial accoutrement of a Ghibeline warrior, tall, erect, with a manly, disdainful bearing, is Guido Guinizelli, from Bologna. The next one, small, slender, and active, his spare limbs enveloped in a black rustling gown, his cunning brows shaded by the large brim of a school-

* Pier delle Vigne born towards the end of the twelfth century, Chancellor of Frederic II.; his ambassador to the pope 1232—1237; his orator at Padua, 1239; his advocate before the Council of Lyons, 1245. Accused of high treason, he committed suicide in his prison 1246. Pier delle Vigne was accused of being the author of that famous treatise: "De tribus Impostoribus," a work intended to declare war to all religious revelation, which was equally laid to the charge of Frederic II., and others, and which probably never existed.

master's cap, his arms loaded with the huge folios of his "*Tesoro*" and "*Tesoretto*," which he holds clasped with more than paternal fondness, is Ser Brunetto Latini, a nobleman, a magistrate, an ambassador, who gave up all honours and dignities for a humble chair in a grammar-school, as if prophesying that on that school was his name to rely for immortality. Next to these two, but younger in years and greater in fame, walking with a slow and sickly step, bending to the ground his pale forehead and his hectic cheeks, his veins heated by the deadly fever he caught in his exile, follows Guido Cavalcanti, once a high-souled, warm-hearted, Ghibeline partisan, now a weak mind in a worn frame, wavering between religious bigotry and sceptic incredulity, riding a long pilgrimage to St. Jago of Galicia, whilst musing on the solution of the great problem with which his contemporaries accused him of being incessantly occupied, "whether it could be found out that God was not."

All these poets, and Fra Guitton d'Arezzo and Dante da Maiano, and his lovely Nina, the eldest Italian poetess, and a small number of others whose names could be added, gave us only languid imitations of the love-songs of the Provençals.

We find among them no ballads, or lays, or *tensons*, or satires, none of the tales and legends of chivalry.

But we repeat, what has been preserved of that primeval Italian literature is no fair representative of what was most popular in that age. The language and versification of those poets could not have reached such a state of perfection, nor the style of the first novelists and historians of the same epoch have displayed such a degree of high finish, if they had not gone through the progressive stages of improvement in some previous attempts which must have been lost to us. It seems even obvious that those Platonic effusions could not be greatly relished, if they could be understood at all, by the lower classes. The Italian poets had many of the faults of their Provençal models, but few of their characteristic beauties. They had indeed purified their love-songs from all the extravagance of troubadoric licentiousness, but they had also deprived them of their most vivid colours, of all warmth and vigour of sentiment. They rivalled and even surpassed them in refinement and straining of thought, and they could boast of a more pure and sober diction; but all these advantages were obtained at the expense of stiffness and barrenness, of dulness and mo-

notony. The excellence of those productions seems to have been valued by their immediate posterity, only in regard to correctness of style and language; and this was too often the test to which the merit of Italian literature was universally referred.

Meanwhile, neither those cold and languid *Canzonieri*, in whose scattered relics it would be difficult to recognise the elements of the greatness of Petrarch, nor the few tales of the anonymous predecessors of Boccaccio, nor the more obscure specimens of Italian minstrelsy, which may be supposed to have been the forerunners of Pulci, Boiardo, and Ariosto, could any longer be the literature of Italy. A free nation, engaged in wide speculations of commerce and industry, in endless experiments of municipal democratic institutions, labouring under the feverish excitement of active life, and enlightened by the rapid diffusion of useful knowledge in her numerous schools, could only look upon the frivolous dreams of chivalrous poetry in the light of an idle pastime. A vague feeling must have gradually prevailed, that literature ought to have a nobler mission than to minister to the convivial festivity of a feudal tournament, or to promote the ebrious riots of a popular holiday. The court and castle had

had their own literature; it was now time that there should be a literature for the people.

The severe pursuits of the Italian universities had already, as we have seen, been made subservient to the interests of the people. Only those schools, from the very nature of their primitive institutions, laboured under the dead weight of an illiberal erudition. They clung to the past with a doting, retrospective veneration, unaware that their mission should have been to adapt the lessons of the past to the wants of the present.

On the other side, a warm and wild effusion of life from the remotest regions of the East had spread over Europe, and started up a thousand rosy creations, dazzling the imagination with all the brightness of the clouds of a summer evening.

Italy had laid the foundation of an edifice which she might, perhaps, never be able to raise as long as she slumbered in the past; but France had raised an edifice which, not unlike one of her fairy castles, floated in the air without foundation. Italian learning might probably have withered like the last sear leaves of a lingering autumn; but French minstrelsy was to vanish like the first blossoms of a premature spring.

The Tartars and Turks in Asia and Africa, the Dominican inquisitors in Spain, put out the last sparks of that Arabian light which had shone in two-thirds of the old continent. The crusades against the Albigenses of Languedoc hushed the warbling of the Provençal nightingales like the first roar of a hurricane. The long wars of England and France drowned the last lays of the northern ministrels in blood. Feudal discords and disorderly elections subverted feelings and manners in Germany; and the harp of the minne-singers, that had rung so nobly at the court of the Swabian emperors, fallen into the hands of vulgar meister-singers, gave only a few low, unheeded notes, that died off among the yawns of an idle populace.

Hence the Provençal is now a dead, though a modern language; the literature of Spain and Germany was revived only several centuries later; and France never had, perhaps, any original literature at all.

Why was Italian literature, for a considerable interval, destined to survive alone? Why was that faint spirit of poetry which it had derived from Spain, Provence, and France, to lead to a result which none of those countries had been able to secure for themselves? Italy, too, had wars and factions, and she never re-

covered from the evils of foreign inroads without plunging madly into her intestine feuds; but the air of liberty breathed over the land, and it is among the most usual wonders of liberty to turn all elements of individual power to the common end of social progress.

The elements of literature were at war in Italy at the close of the Middle Ages. There was, on the one hand, the unwieldy mass of scholastic erudition, on the other, the unsubstantial spirit of romantic poetry. The work of a genius was required to bring those elements together, to complete the work of creation—that genius was DANTE.

ITALY.

SECOND PERIOD.—ITALIAN REPUBLICS.

CHAPTER I.

DANTE.

Uncertainties about the life and writings of Dante—A picture of his age—Flourishing state of the Italian Republics—Their factions—Guelphs and Ghibelines—Bianchi and Neri at Florence—Dante's public life—His exile—His death—The Divine Comedy.

"To be great and unhappy,"—such is the sentence stamped on the brows of him whom Providence selects for its highest designs, and against that sentence the gifted one is seldom tempted to murmur. True loftiness of mind is never unattended by a corresponding nobleness of character, and glory is endeared in the eyes of her suitors in proportion as the enmity of fortune, and the malignity of men set her smiles at a higher rate. A man of genius belongs to

no age; the whole future is his inheritance, he is the contemporary of all the generations to come. Justice is seated on his tombstone.

But to the memory of Dante, justice was very late, if ever awarded.

Not only was there for him no shelter against the tossing of the tempests of life, but not even the grave, his last refuge, was spared. His mortal remains were searched for with all the rage of party spirit, and, but for the interference of generous friends, even twenty years after his death the threshold of the tomb would have been violated, and his ashes scattered to the winds.

New generations ensued, upon whose effeminate ears the clashing of those verses of adamant sounded like harshness and rudeness, upon whose degenerate morals the sternness of that rigid temper had the effect of a constant upbraiding. Such of his works as had escaped the papal interdict sank into wilful neglect. The holy strains of the inspired patriot lay low and obscure, like the chiding of a doting censor, and when, at different intervals, an ephemeral enthusiasm awoke in Italian bosoms a vague longing for the lessons of their earliest master, the divine precepts were found disfigured, and the fountain of truth troubled.

But it was doomed that the warmest friends of Dante should prove no less fatal to his memory than his bitterest enemies. No sooner was his sacred poem rescued from oblivion than it fell into the hands of a swarm of commentators, who seized upon it like ravens crowding upon the body of a fallen warrior. Under pretence of rescuing the original text from the injuries of age and ignorance, of tearing asunder the veil of mysticism and allegory in which the poet, indulging the taste of his age, had mantled his eternal truths, they plunged the Divine Comedy into an ocean of doubt; they racked, they cramped, they stretched the sense even of its most lucid poetical effusions, to shape it after their own narrow-minded conceits; they made of it a maze of enigma and mystery, a mosaic of quibbles and acrostics, a monster which timid minds cannot approach without awe and superstition.

At length, in our days, Ugo Foscolo, a kindred genius, has turned his efforts to follow, in its soaring, the genius of Dante. His discourse on the text of the Divine Comedy written, as it was, when age and exile had fitted him rather for contemplative than creative pursuits, is still the work of a poet, and has rendered justice to the poet. It has cleared the fame of Dante

from the stains of the calumnies of his opponents, and from the smoke of the incense of his worshippers. It has driven the pharisees and money-lenders out of the temple. It has levelled to the ground all the wretched systems and hypotheses by which we had hitherto been introduced to the perusal of Dante.

True, Foscolo has demolished more than he could rebuild; he met with obstacles that it was in the power of no man to remove. The poet is still in many passages impenetrable, but he is a poet at least; a great deal remains for us to regret, but a great deal more has been restored to our admiration. Where Foscolo had no means of bringing light upon his subject, he endeavoured, at least, to make us aware in its full extent of our ignorance.

We have learned, distinctly and beyond all doubt, that not a single line of that poem has been preserved in its original autograph; that all we read of it is taken from manuscripts, appearing at late intervals, in different places, adulterated by time, by ignorance, and party spirit; that those different texts upon which we are compelled to rely are but too often and too sadly at variance; that scarcely any thing can be fairly determined concerning the epoch, or the place, in which the poem was written,

that the whole of Dante's life, but especially the period to which the greatest interest is attached —his exile—is related in absurd and contradictory terms, whilst not one of his lines was dictated without direct allusion to the hopes and fears which wrought within his soul in the different stages of his anxious existence.

The discourse of Ugo Foscolo is evidently tending to a literary scepticism, which ought to be recommended as most salutary to all admirers of Dante. The blind obstinacy by which commentators pretended to account for every thing, has been too long the principal cause that nothing could be understood. The blank that time and adverse circumstances have brought upon our knowledge of the poet's mind cannot be filled up with vain gratuitous conjectures. The spirit of Dante must be studied in his verses, in his text, bare of all commentary. The Divine Comedy is to be read without any other aid than a previous knowledge of the spirit of the age in which the poet moved, and of which that work was a vast, vivid, all-embracing reflection.

The youth of Dante was passed in Florence, then the most free and stormy, as well as the most refined and flourishing, among the cities of distracted Italy. Born of an ancient family

of noble extraction, he was bred up in ease and affluence, and enjoyed all the advantages of an excellent education. In that earliest period of his age he was permitted to indulge in deep and recondite studies, in dreams of love and poetry, in the cultivation of all liberal and chivalrous accomplishments.

But that was no age to allow the scholar the uninterrupted pursuit of his abstruse speculations, or the bard the enjoyment of his harmless melodies, or the citizen the comforts and affections of home. It was an age of strife and violence, of excitement and restlessness, when every city lay in a perpetual state of siege, when every citizen slept in his armour. All individual means and powers were made subservient to the common interest; the lands and houses of private men, their families, their lives, their bodily strength, and mental faculties, belonged by right to the republic.

At the age of twenty-four Dante was already obliged to lay aside books and verses, and with that versatility of genius by which men of that age seemed to multiply themselves, he donned the armour and fought the battles of his country —he sat in the councils that ruled over its destinies—he advocated its glory and interests as a legate abroad, and promoted its welfare as a

supreme magistrate at home—until, involved in the civil discords that tore Florence as well as all the rest of Tuscany and Italy, he was, in his thirty-seventh year, plunged into all the calamities of exile.

From the peace of Constance to the age of Dante, who was born in 1265, nearly two centuries had elapsed, during which Italian independence had proceeded with almost uninterrupted prosperity.

The two sons of Frederic II., Conrad and Manfred, had successively fallen victims to the jealousy and ambition of the popes. The last, heir to all the virtues of his father, a warrior of lofty mind and captivating manners, had rallied the noblest champions around the Ghibeline standard, and would have given that party the preponderance, and vested in his person the rights and dignities of the then vacant empire, had not Pope Urban IV. called to his aid Charles of Anjou, brother of St. Louis of France, who, at the head of a body of French cavalry, seconded by the combined efforts of the Guelphs, accomplished the conquest of the Two Sicilies. The heroic death of Manfred could not suffice to assuage the inveteracy of priestly hatred. His excommunicated bones were dug up from the lowly grave to which the piety of

his enemies had consigned them, and strown on the blood-stained field, to rot and bleach under the inclemency of the seasons.*

Three years later, Conradin, the son of Conrad, the last of the Swabians, a young hero of eighteen, forcing himself from the fond embrace of his foreboding mother, crossed the Alps nearly unattended, trusting his cause to the sympathy of the Italian Ghibelines, and, at the head of a powerful army raised by the Lombard republics, he marched against Naples to claim the crown of his fathers. His partisans rallied around him, they bled for him, they sheltered him with their bodies, until, left almost alone on the field, the royal youth was overwhelmed by numbers, and falling into the hands of unrelenting foes, he was sacrificed in cold blood to their cowardly policy.

The Guelph party had thus prevailed, and Italy almost universally acknowledged French and Papal ascendency, when the arrogance and libertinism of the conquerors of the Two Sicilies soon roused in the heart of the enthralled nation their native jealousy and vindictiveness. The magnanimous rancour of one man, Giovanni da Procida, ripened the seeds of a long-cherished

* Battle of Benevento, defeat and death of Manfred, A. D. 1265. Battle of Tagliacozzo, death of Conradin, 1268.

conspiracy of more than ten years' standing; and, by a sudden burst of popular effervescence, snatching from the French the sceptre of Sicily, and involving them in a long war against Aragon, relieved the rest of Italy from all apprehension of the influence of the House of Anjou.*

The Sicilian Vespers have long been made a subject of horror and execration among civilised nations in after ages. The shade of mystery under which the awful deed was perpetrated, has caused it to be considered in the light of a treacherous assassination; the atrocities inseparable from that scene of bloody execution have reflected disgrace upon the sanctity of the undertaking. But the blood shed by a people in the vindication of their independence falls upon the head of the usurper who urged them to such fatal extremities. The laws of nations and the rights of humanity no longer apply to a conqueror who saddens and tortures the image of his Creator in the person of his fellow-beings. The boundaries of each country were determined by the works of God. He who invades the home of his neighbour is no longer a brother.

By the Sicilian Vespers the power of France

* Sicilian Vespers, March 30, 1282.

was thus utterly neutralised, nor could any foreign ruler ever since exercise any influence on the affairs of Italy, except by placing himself at the head of some of the numerous factions with which the country was raving, invited and supported by the arms of the Italians themselves.

The Tuscan and Lombard republics, secure in the enjoyment of their independence, had reached their highest degree of prosperity. They displayed that ardour of public spirit, that soberness and energy of private virtues, which freedom alone is wonted to foster. The plainness and modesty of their manners at home formed a noble contrast with the magnificence exhibited in their public edifices, in the monuments they raised to the Divinity, and in the asylums they opened for the refuge of suffering humanity. It was in that age that those cathedrals and palaces were erected which formed the wonder of after generations. It was in that age that the republic of Florence bid one of her architects "build the greatest church in the world."

The fine arts rose simultaneously, and advanced with gigantic steps. Architecture and sculpture led the van of their sister arts, and had their chief seat in Tuscany, under the dis-

ciples of Nicolas of Pisa. Painting was restored in Florence by Cimabue, and by his pupil and rival Giotto, a friend and familiar of Dante, whose lineaments he transmitted to posterity; whilst another of his friends and masters, Oderisi da Gubbio, revived the art of miniature painting; and Casella, who numbered also Dante among his pupils, gave a new life to the science of music.

It was in such intercourse, and under the tuition of Brunetto Latini, who had opened in Florence a school for grammar and rhetoric, and of Guido Guinizelli and Guido Cavalcanti, who then disputed the palm of poetical valour, that the blessed adolescence of Dante was spent.

Wherever he passed, from one to the other of the Italian universities, to Bologna, to Padua, he found the love of study, and the culture of taste in the fine arts, blended with the ardour of liberty, and with the martial spirit of the age; —for, letters and arts want excitement; they can sail with all winds; but not without wind; great minds expand in proportion to their own exertions: they exult in the heart-stirring commotions of the great drama of life, in the conflict of factions, in the tumult of wars. Give a genius passion and movement, delirium and fever, anxiety and suffering; let the mountain-

stream madden through rocks and over precipices, dash and foam against bridges and dikes, but let it not exhaust its might on the plain, to stagnate in marshes and mire.

Wherever he passed, the poet traversed the wide plains of Lombardy, smiling with plentiful crops, the reward of a laborious husbandry, aided by a spirit of enterprise that rescued marshes and swamps from the bed of rivers, opened canals, and raised dikes, edging and fencing that garden of the vale of the Po, whose fertility forms, even in our days, the envy of foreigners.

He might see the blue waves of the Adriatic and Tyrrhenian seas glittering with a thousand sails, loaded with the treasures of the East, with articles of wealth and luxury, with which the West was still unacquainted: he might visit in Lombardy the forges where the armour was tempered and burnished that covered the breasts of all the feudal barons of Europe; in Tuscany the silk factories, where the mantles and trains of their proud ladies were woven. He might meet on the road of the Alps crowds of those shrewd Lombards, who at the peril of their lives established the first rudiments of banking and money-exchanging in France, in England, and Germany.

He might converse at Venice with Marco Polo and other daring adventurers; and at Rome with the missionaries on their return from their eccentric pilgrimages, relating wonders of the golden realms they had explored, and of the stars of an unknown hemisphere they had been the first to salute.*

He found every where a growing, stirring, bustling population, who seemed to feel crowded and confined at home, and panted for adventure and excitement abroad. Here Bologna marshalled forty thousand of her combatants within her walls, there Genoa manned her fleets with thirty thousand sailors, whilst the colonies of that city on the Bosphorus, and in the Black Sea, nearly equalled the wealth and power of the capital, and the emperors of Constantinople were often braved on their throne by the repeated attacks of their restless neighbours, whilst Venice might boast with good reason, of having extended her sway over one-fourth and a half of the Roman empire.†

* Marco Polo born at Venice about the year 1250, of noble family; starts with his father and uncle for the East, 1271; visits Tartary, China, and part of India; sails from China to Persia. Returns to Venice, 1295; prisoner of the Genoese, he writes the description of his travels during his captivity, 1298; set at liberty, 1302, died 1323. "Delle Maraviglie del Mondo da lui vedute." First edition, Venice, 1495.

† Or rather, of the Empire of Romania, as it has been recently observed.

And if it is true, as it has been often averred, that his love for the arid study of polemic divinity and scholastic philosophy led Dante in his youth to the university of Paris, and even to Oxford, the contrast between what he had viewed in those countries, and what he met on the better side of the Alps, must have cheered his patriotic heart with ineffable joy at his return.

The comparison is now sadly inverted; and the Italian who travels along the rivers of France, or on the railroads of England and America, who witnesses the rapid growth of New York or Manchester, has reason to smile with pity at the exulting vaunt with which the happy ones point out the results of their present prosperity, or at the sanguine hopes they entertain of endless future improvement; for the mournful experience of his country teaches him that nothing can last here below; that every nation has its own day; that the more a country has arrived at the height of success, the more by the perpetual alternation of human vicissitudes, it fosters the germs of disorganisation, and hastens to its ruin.

The first and most permanent source of evil for the Italian republics lay in the spiritual and temporal influence of the popes.

The day had been when the pontiffs of Rome

had, for their own security, advocated the interests of the people, when their legates were seen stepping forward amidst the fray of brotherly feuds, preaching the truce of the cross; when one Giovanni di Vicenza, a legate of Gregory IX., an inspired monk, a prophet and legislator, by the might of his eloquence, assembled the representatives of the cities of Romagna and Lombardy, to bring about a universal reconciliation on the Plains of Paquara, where four hundred thousand of the most conspicuous partisans, Guelphs and Ghibelines, headed by lords and bishops, and by their magistrates, riding in all the pomp of their municipal chariots, knelt at the friar's feet, and abjured their old grudges, swearing an eternal amity that was to last, alas! only a few months.* The day had been when Alexander IV. preached a crusade against the first usurper of Italian liberties, Ezzelino da Romano, and hunted from town to town the hydra, from each drop of whose blood a new tyrant was to shoot forth.†

But that day had passed long since; and the popes, abusing the gratitude of the people, to whose efforts they were indebted for their preservation, set no limits to their pretensions;

* A.D. 1233. † A.D. 1259.

they forced the allied cities to minister to their religious persecutions, and share in the wars which they waged against the pretended enemies of the faith. Those same Giovanni di Vicenza and Leo da Perego, and other legates of Gregory IX.; followed by the Dominican ministers of the Inquisition, erected their tribunals in the squares of the cities; hundreds of Cathari and Paterini, and other sects, connected or not with the Albigenses of Languedoc, who had perished by the crusade of Simon de Montfort, expired in the flames before the eyes of a horror-struck, reluctant multitude, whose notions of liberty rather inclined to toleration of opinion and freedom of inquiry.*

The age was still wild with daring extravagance; the activity of men's minds knew no limits, and the most eminent geniuses, from Frederic II., and his secretary, Pier delle Vigne, down to the noblest friends and masters of Dante, and Dante himself, loved to dwell on dangerous doubts, constantly waylaid by their specious logic; and the suspicion of heresy, and even of open infidelity, was often courted as a mark of superiority of intellect.

Thus by a strange contrast, whilst the roads and

* Establishment of the Dominican Inquisition, by a bull of Innocent III. dated 1216. Burning of sixty heretics at Verona, 1233.

bridges seemed too narrow to give passage to the numberless hosts flowing to the revivals and jubilees, whilst the thresholds and floors of holy shrines were kissed off by the devotion of bigoted enthusiasts, Fra Dolcino, a hermit of epicurean tastes, a precursor of the *Père Enfantin*, preaching the easy doctrines of the *communauté des biens*, and *communauté des femmes*, nearly in the same terms in which they were to be revived five hundred and thirty years later, attracted an immense crowd of votaries, male and female, whom he kept feasting and revelling at the expense of the faithful, robbing and ravaging the mountains of Canavese and Montferrat, until, besieged and taken by famine, he was burnt at the stake with the fair partner of his orgies, and twelve of his apostles and proselytes —a sad instance of the fate that awaited, in that iron age, all innovators, while the good sense and soberness of our days needed no more formidable weapon than ridicule to laugh the Saint Simonians out of fashion.*

But the intolerance of the popes in spiritual matters would have proved, perhaps, less pernicious than their interference in the more worldly concerns of political questions.

* A.D. 1305—1307.

The factions of the Guelphs and Ghibelines, which the peace of Constance, or, at the latest, the death of the second Frederic, might have happily ended, were opened afresh by the crafty ambition and jealousy of the pontiffs. The bondage of Italy to the empire had been long since broken for ever. It was long since enfranchised Lombardy had any danger to apprehend on the part of divided and exhausted Germany; every free town was considered, behind its walls, and even in the open field, more than a match for the whole host of an emperor. The Imperial or Ghibeline party, could then no longer hope or wish to restore, in its full extent, the absolute sway of the Cæsars of Germany.

But a natural feeling of admiration and gratitude for the princes of the house of Swabia, a sense of duty, of faith, and allegiance; the ideas of greatness, of splendour and dignity attached to the imperial crown; the fond recollections of the glories of Rome, and the hopes of seeing them realised in their visions of an Italian unity; their continual experience of the evils resulting from municipal dissensions and popular anarchy, caused the dispersed remnants of the discomfited aristocracy, and the warmest supporters of Ghibelinism, to regard the present

state of things as one of interregnum and transition; to cling fondly and closely to the vain phantom of a demolished empire, and to view with mistrust and indignation the slow and wily arts by which pontifical hypocrisy attempted to erect a theocratic throne on the august metropolis, which had been, and they expected would be still, the seat of empire.

On the other hand, an unbounded, undiscerning love of independence, the intoxicating exultation of triumph, and an inextinguishable hatred and rancour against all remains of feudalism and monarchy—the illiberal prejudices of municipal rivalries—the excitement of the public debates of a popular sovereignty—inspired the largest mass of the people, and the heads of the Guelph party, with the blind presumption that every city could suffice, and ought to belong to itself; or that, if common interests or dangers should require the renewal of their confederation, their natural bond lay in the sacred unity of their common faith, their national banner was to be the standard of the church—that standard with which all their most intimate and indelible affections were virtually blended—that standard under which their pious fathers had rallied, when, with the blessings of Alexander and Innocent, they had, by prodi-

gies of valour, repeatedly crushed the pride of the Frederics in the days of the formidable Lombard league of happy remembrance.

Such were the main purposes by which the most sincere partisans of the Guelph and Ghibeline factions were actuated.

But, as is too generally the case in all political divisions, every party, righteous and sacred as it is in its origin, and so long as it is only the organ and representative of a principle, ceases to be so as soon as it is made subservient to personal views.

Thus the populace, who always adhered to the Guelph party, only obeyed, however, the impulse of its leaders; and those, whatever the class they belonged to, whatever the principles by which they were raised into power, had no sooner obtained it, than more or less openly they embraced aristocratic views, and joined the ranks of that Ghibeline party by which alone power seemed to be secured and sanctioned; while the nobility, by birth and feelings always staunch Ghibelines, serving however their private passions, their family feuds and jealousies, not unfrequently sided with the Guelphs, and embraced the cause of the people.

The elements of the two parties were nearly balanced in all cities; but when, either by sud-

den internal commotion or by external influence, one of the two prevailed, the other was dispersed by massacres, banishments, and confiscations, to return afterwards at the head of neighbouring auxiliaries to exert, in its turn, equally awful retaliations. Wave after wave the two opposite factions were ebbing and flowing from one end of the country to the other.

The frequency of murders, the appalling perpetrations of domestic tragedies, gradually undermined the basis of sound morals, on which alone the sovereignty of the people could harmlessly subsist, and ministered to hereditary animosities, which no human interference could any longer reconcile. All tender and kind affections were scared from the most gentle bosoms by the habitual spectacle of revolting atrocities. The innocent emotions of love not seldom added fuel to the vehemence of political passions.

Here Imelda Lambertazzi sucked death from the wounds of her lover, who had fallen at her feet pierced by the poisoned daggers of her brothers. There Buondelmonte paid with his blood the outrage of which he had rendered himself guilty, by deserting a noble maiden to whom he had plighted his faith.

The bonds of family relation, even to the remotest degree, were held in a reverence of which

we have no example in our days, except perhaps in the Highlands of Scotland, or in the forests of Corsica. The next of kin hastened to the injured party, espoused their quarrel without examination, stained the points of their swords and poniards in the blood of the slain, and flew to the pursuit of the murderers. Soon doors and windows were fastened, barricades were stretched across the streets—all trade and intercourse were at an end—blood flowed in the squares, in the churches, in the halls of justice. The alarm was spread from town to town; whoever had old accounts to settle seized the opportunity; whoever had no quarrel of his own embraced that of his neighbour.

Brawling and fighting were the elements of the age.

The balance, however, could never be so nicely established that it might not be perceived, in the midst of those complicated contentions, that Milan and the great majority of the Lombard cities inclined to Ghibelinism, whilst the Guelphs more constantly prevailed at Florence and in the rest of Tuscany, with the exception of Pisa; and as Ghibelinism naturally led to aristocracy, and aristocracy paved the way for the usurpation of tyranny, so the Lombard republics were early engaged in des-

perate struggles to resist the attempts of their nobles, who, under the pretext of favouring the interests of their party, and securing public order and tranquillity, were bringing into their hands the supreme power of the state.

Thus, in the age of Dante, nearly every city in Lombardy had invested with the highest magistracy some of their noble families; and although the forms and insignia of their municipal institutions were still nominally preserved, yet, by accustoming the people to acknowledge a hereditary supremacy, the basis of future absolute sovereignty was gradually laid.

Truly, the people did, by repeated revolts, shake off the yoke to which they were not yet thoroughly schooled, and the reaction was sudden and formidable. The whole country was filled with wandering tyrants, who had too soon or too far reckoned upon the passive endurance of the people, and who considered themselves fortunate to have thus escaped the worst consequences of the resentment of the dormant lion, whom they had undertaken to tame.

The first attempts at novelty are apt to prove fatal to the innovators.

The fate of Ezzelino da Romano was not a sufficient warning to the ambition of Alberigo

his brother, and he fell, like him, a victim to popular fury, stabbed to death with his wife and children in the hall of his palace at Treviso.* William of Montferrat, who had extended his sceptre nearly over all Piedmont, taken prisoner by his subjects of Tortona and Alexandria, was shut up in an iron cage; nor could his near relationship to the Greek emperor and the king of Castile, nor could any remonstrance or menace, withdraw him from the vengeance of those fierce republicans, who dragged him from town to town, exhibiting him like a wild monster, until he died of his sufferings after two years of captivity.† Ugolino della Gherardesca, who, profiting by the calamities of his country, had by treason and crime usurped the high dominion in Pisa, fallen into the power of an exasperated multitude and given up to his bitterest adversaries, walled up in a dark dungeon, with two of his sons and grandsons, expired amidst those pangs of exquisite torture that the fancy of Dante alone could have dared to picture in verse.‡

* A.D. 1260. † A.D. 1292.

‡ Defeat of the Pisans by the Genoese off Meloria, with loss of 5,000 killed, and 11,000 prisoners. Final downfall of the maritime power of Pisa, 1284. Treason and death of Ugolino, 1288.

All these and a thousand such horrible scenes were constantly exhibiting all round and nearly under the eyes of the young poet, and he must have received their impression in the prime of youth, in that age in which such sensations were most apt to take possession of his soul, to haunt and fatigue his imagination for the rest of his life.

Florence alone, preferring the storms of liberty to the slumbers of servitude, had not, in one instance, departed from her democratic policy, and liberty seemed, in the days of Dante, to have taken shelter within its walls.

The factions of the Guelphs and Ghibelines, first brought into open collision in 1215, by the murder of Buondelmonte, had ever since disputed the field with incessant vicissitudes; they had obeyed the Ghibeline ascendency of Frederic II. in 1248, and that of his son Manfred in 1260, when Florence was by turn subdued and spared by the more than Roman magnanimity of her exiled citizen Farinata degli Uberti; and were now at rest, since the conquest of Charles of Anjou had secured the triumph of the Guelphs in 1265.

Dante, was then, born in a Guelph city, and of a Guelph family, and it was as a Guelph that he was present at the battles of the repub-

lic against the Ghibelines of Arezzo and Pisa in 1289, 1290, and distinguished himself for shining valour, especially at the combat of Campaldino, in which he is represented as fighting valiantly in the foremost ranks of the Florentine cavalry. It was as a Guelph that, restored to peaceful life, he offered his talents as he had lent his arm to the service of that republic, and was engaged in several embassies, and discharged many other important functions for the course of ten years, until he was raised by popular favour to the supreme magistracy of the state.

However much it may result from various passages in the works of Dante himself, and especially from the fond and moving picture of Florence in her age of innocence, given by his ancestor, Cacciaguida, in the fifteenth canto of Paradise, that manners had degenerated from the primitive simplicity of the ever-regretted olden times, yet is there no doubt that Florence was still the seat of all manly and austere republican virtues. The sovereignty of public opinion watched over the conduct of private men; idleness and indolence were proscribed as civil trangressions.

The people were mustered in their corporations of arts and trades, and the members of

the noblest and wealthiest families sued for admittance into those fraternities, powerful by their numbers and unanimity, and by their right of universal suffrage. The college of the *Priori*, who, with the Gonfalonier of justice, constituted the *signoria* of the republic, were selected from the mass of those plebeian associations; and Dante owed to his skill in miniature painting, by which he was enlisted in the corporation of dyers, his elevation to the rank of the Priori, among whom, by the superiority of his abilities, he soon assumed a well-deserved ascendency.

But he had reached this high station in an epoch of trial and hardship. A crisis that had long been in progress under the deceiving appearances of a profound calm, was now fatally mature.

The Guelphs, who had for more than five-and-thirty years held an undisputed sway in Florence, were not free from jealousies and animosities among themselves. The families of the Cerchi and Donati, the first accused of secretly inclining to Ghibelinism, the last considered as composed of the most violent Guelphs, were waiting for the first opportunity of rushing into an open warfare. The occasion was not late to present itself. The quar-

rels of the Pistoiese family of the Cancellieri, two branches of which, the Bianchi and Neri, had, from 1296 to 1300, startled all Tuscany by their frequent assassinations and skirmishes, were introduced into Florence with the pious design of bringing them to pacification; when the Cerchi, espousing the cause of the Bianchi, and the Donati siding with the Neri, the long-repressed hostilities burst forth, and discord whirled its torch madly and blindly over desolate Florence.*

It was in this dangerous contingency that Dante was raised to the council of the Priori. He had belonged, by birth and by choice, to the faction of the Cerchi, nor had he been reconciled to the opposite party by his marriage with Gemma, sister of the sanguinary partisan Corso Donati, the great leader of the Neri, and Dante's personal enemy—a lady of proud spirit and of high birth, but with whom, notwithstanding she had brought him six children, he seemed never to have been at peace, either owing to the ever-verdant remembrance of Beatrice Portinari, the first, the only love of his tenderest age, the subject of his juvenile rhymes, the source of his inextinguishable

* A. D. 1300.

regrets, or owing to the ungracious temper of his wife herself, or finally, to the bias of those same political antipathies, which he had fondly hoped, by that ill-sorted alliance, to overcome.

But though his native predilection inclined him to favour the Cerchi, and, in consequence, their allies, the Bianchi; as a magistrate, he listened to no party spirit, and the most virulent champions of the two parties were, by his advice, confined to the two opposite frontiers of the republic.

The Bianchi, however, who had been relegated to Sarzana, having remonstrated against the unhealthiness of the place, and one of them, the poet Guido Cavalcanti, a friend of Dante, having fallen dangerously ill, they were in an evil hour recalled.

The Neri, who felt themselves wronged by this act of partiality, had recourse to Pope Boniface VIII., with whom they had long since opened secret negociations, and who was bitterly adverse to the Bianchi, in whom he apprehended ill-disguised favourers of Ghibelinism. The Signoria, aware of these hostile dispositions, charged Dante with the mission of expostulating with the pontiff in Rome. But the false priest, while he entertained the poet with fair promises, sent to Florence, as

a mediator, Charles of Valois, the brother of Philip-le-Bel, king of France, who rallying the dispersed Neri, let them loose against their adversaries, issued decrees of proscription and confiscation against the Bianchi, pillaged and ravaged their property, and rased their houses to the ground.*

This was the convulsion which decided the fate of Dante.

He was accused of the basest offences, he was sentenced to pay an enormous fine, his property was forfeited, his house pillaged and rased to the ground. Subsequently he was condemned to be burnt alive, when he began that career of wandering and misery that was to end only with his life.

He was then in his thirty-seventh year.

He joined the other Florentine exiles, who assembled in the territory of Arezzo, and as the Bianchi already were, perhaps, Ghibelines in their heart, and had now no other resource left, they joined the Ghibelines of Arezzo and Pisa, the inveterate enemies of the Florentine republic. Having thus raised men and arms, headed by Count Alexander da Romena, and by a council of twelve leaders, of whose number

* A. D. 1302.

was Dante, they appeared with ten thousand combatants at the gates of Florence. Owing, however, to some dissension among their chiefs in the plan of attack, their efforts proved unsuccessful, and they were repelled with heavy losses.*

Overwhelmed by this last reverse, Dante crossed the Appennines with bitterness and despondency in his heart, and sought refuge in Lombardy.

The Lombard republics were now, as we have seen, hopelessly wrestling against all-pervading tyranny, arming the chiefs of one party against another, shedding torrents of blood, no longer with the hope of destroying, but only by a blind necessity of changing their masters.

Already the Della Torre and Visconti disputed the sceptre of Milan with alternate success. The Este in Ferrara, and the Della Scala in Verona, founded a slower but surer basis of absolute dominion. It was at the courts of these tyrants that Dante, now an open Ghibeline, but still a proud, insubordinate republican, was compelled to sue for hospitality.

To follow him in his long wanderings, trusting

* A. D. 1304.

to the accounts of his various biographers, would be a tedious and unprofitable task. The devotion of the Italians for his memory in after ages has given rise to a hundred idle traditions. Inscriptions are to be found in several districts, pointing out with pious idolatry the apartments he occupied, the desk on which he wrote, the stone on which he sat, and, as it were, the very impress of his footsteps. He was in Padua, in 1306, at the house of the Marquis Papafavi; he attended a Ghibeline meeting at Mugello, and was, in the same year, a guest of Morello Malaspina, Marquis of Lunigiana, a generous and courteous lord, who forgot old political differences in his eagerness to welcome the victim of misfortune.

How long he roamed abroad; in what period of his career he was in Casentino with Count Guido Salvatico, or with the Lords della Faggiuola in the mountains of Urbino; when and how long he was cheered by the hospitality of Bosone de' Raffaeli da Gubbio, a learned and accomplished Ghibeline, and, like him, a man more used to the frowns than to the smiles of fortune; whether he wrote a great part of his poem in the monastery of Santa Croce di Fonte Avellana near Gubbio, or at the castle of Tolmino in Friuli, when a guest of Pagano della

Torre, patriarch of Aquileia; must be left to the ingenuity of his commentators to conjecture.

His favourite abode, however, and one to which he seems, by his own confession, to have repeatedly repaired, was the court of the Lords della Scala in Verona.

This reigning family consisted, in 1306, of two brothers, Alboino and Cane, the last of whom, a youth of eighteen, by his splendour and liberality, by his brilliant chivalrous qualities, was eminent among the princes of Lombardy, and was looked upon as the pride and hope of the Ghibeline party.

How far Dante may have shared in the common illusion, so as to endure the thraldom of a courtly life, and swell the gaudy train of that young hero, cannot now be satisfactorily demonstrated. Certain it is, however, that Italy beheld more than once the sad spectacle of the wandering poet, of the silent, pensive, solitary scholar, of the soft-speaking, grave-looking, absent-minded dreamer, whose milk of human nature calamity had turned into sour misanthropy, clad in his plain garb of grey cassock, his stern brows shaded by his uncomely cowl; his pale, care-worn, long visage composed to an ill-repressed expression of utter scorn, lost and neglected at a prince's levee amidst the sim-

pering, grimacing, noisy crowd of satellites, sycophants, and jesters, amidst the thousand vile beings who in all times and in every court never fail to find favour in the eyes of the great by that natural law of assimilation, by which (as Dante himself bitterly replied to his patron's taunting insinuations) "like loves like."

But if he cherished for one moment the hope that the valour and ambition of Cane might alter the course of fate, bring about the humiliation of his adversaries, and restore him to the home of his fathers, that hope must have been speedily undeceived. Italy was as yet ill-trained and reluctant to servitude; and the new usurpers, far from having leisure to conspire against the peace of their neighbours, could hardly keep ground against the tide of popular rebellion, and watch over the conspiracies of their own subjects at home.

Hope failing after hope, the home-sick exile, consumed by chagrin and by powerless rancour, disgusted with the arrogance of his patrons, and the baseness of their minions, the sternness of his temper raising enemies against him in every quarter, felt his courage repeatedly overwhelmed by calamity. He then had recourse to his studies, plunged headlong into the deepest of his theological and philosophical

researches, followed in their infant discoveries the physical sciences, astronomy, and mathematics, and revisited those seminaries of learning, in which, by the vastness of his encyclopedical lore, by his valiancy in public dissertations and disputes, he had left, from his earliest youth, the most dazzling reputation.

A day dawned at last under brighter auspices, at the epoch of the descent of the Emperor Henry VII., of the house of Luxemburg, into Italy.

The German throne, vacant for seventeen years, then indifferently reorganised by the sovereign genius of Rodolph of Hapsburg, and suffered to relapse into utter disorder under Albert of Austria, had now finally fallen into the hands of a monarch who, unable to restore peace and order in Germany, had spirit of enterprise enough to look for better fortunes in Italy. Dante, who, like all other Ghibelines, had never ceased to look towards Germany for the redress of their wrongs, and had by several epistles, and by more than one apostrophe in his poem, invoked the mediation of Henry's predecessors, now hearing of the emperor's disposition, resumed his former spirits, and started forth, in his treatise "De Monarchia," as the advocate of the rights of empire.

Henry, meanwhile, had crossed the Alps at the head of only two thousand cavalry, offered his mediations to, and exacted the homage of several cities with various success, and, joined by a large Ghibeline host, had undertaken the siege of Florence. Dante did not, on this occasion, bear arms against his native city, but his voice of repining and despondency had now resumed a tone of invective and menace; he declined the ignominious terms on which he had been offered readmission, and shut against himself all possible means of future reconciliation. Henry was, in the meanwhile, repulsed from Florence, after a few months of ineffectual siege, and died, poisoned by a monk with the sacrament, at Buonconvento near Siena, leaving the Ghibelines in a worse plight than he had found them at his arrival. This occurred in 1313.

Dante resumed his studies, his wanderings, his miseries. He crossed the Alps once more, and was received with wonder and applause among the doctors of the Sorbonne in Paris. He reappeared at Verona in 1320, where he sustained a learned thesis on the two elements, earth and water. The excitement of these public exhibitions had a tonic effect on his shattered nerves, and he was heard to repeat,

"that the fame he was acquiring had power to reanimate him even in the bitterness of exile." In the same year he repaired to Ravenna, where peace at last awaited him, and final rest from all the evils of life.

There reigned in Ravenna, in those days, and for more than fifty-seven years, Guido Novello da Polenta, an octogenarian sage, renowned for valour and prudence, a liberal patron, and no mean cultivator of all noble studies, and who had learned mercy from his own experience of the reverses of fortune.

There might, perhaps, be still in his outward apparel, but there were certainly in the inmost core of his heart, the traces of the deep mourning he had worn for the loss of a beloved, apparently of an only daughter, that incautious Francesca, whom his wakeful remorse still smote him for having sacrificed to the selfish views of a cold reason of state. That tragedy was now far back in the past,* but the lonesomeness to which the bereaved parent had been left must have allowed little chance for the healing mediation of time, and the poet must have found that court such as the sympathies of a distressed mind would have chosen as its fittest abode—a house of sorrow.

* A.D. 1288.

His generous host, not satisfied with evincing the highest regard for the exiled bard in his palace, thought he could afford diversion to the preyings of his mind by engaging him in a difficult message to the republic of Venice. But the ill-success of his embassy so deeply affected the susceptible heart of the poet, (who, under the outward aspect of stern misanthropy, was open to the fondest emotions, and loved, as he hated, with all the vastness of his colossal faculties,) that he fell severely ill of vexation and disappointment, and hastened back to Ravenna, where he arrived in time only to expire in the arms of his friend.*

Guido had no sooner laid the mortal remains of the poet in his humble grave, and paid a tribute of praise to his memory by a few words at his funeral ceremony, than his hoary hairs and his piety were of no avail to shield him against the storms of public life; and, forced from his seat at Ravenna by a sudden start of hostile faction, he also closed his days in exile in the following year.

Excepting his juvenile rhymes of love, and the Vita Nuova, a romance of his pure and heavenly affection for Beatrice, all the works of Dante in his exile were, by the constant

* September 14, 1321.

fretting of his uneasy mind, left incomplete.* There was only one conception—that one on which he dwelt with longer and fonder intensity—for which no toils were spared, no relaxation indulged—"the sacred poem to which heaven and earth had lent their hand, which had for many years worn and exhausted him," —only one monument on which he lived to see the last stone laid—the Divine Comedy.

Be it true or not that he had conceived the first plan of that poem, and had written seven cantos of it, whilst living at home, it is certain that never did that work assume its form and consistency, never did its author concentrate all his thoughts, all his hopes upon it, until after his expulsion from Florence; and the Divine Comedy is to be regarded altogether as the work of his exile. It was the work of all the rest of his life, and it might be proved that he was, to his last days, constantly at work, adding or suppressing, recasting and correcting as he was influenced by circumstances, as his hopes were fading and colouring, and his passions ebbing and flowing.

* Dante's Latin works: "De Monarchia"—"De Vulgari Eloquio," Paris, 1577. Italian works: "La Vita Nuova"—"Rime," Venice, 1527. "Il Convito." First editions of the "Divina Commedia," Foligno, Mantua, Verona, 1472. Complete editions of his works, Venice, 1741, 1757.

From the first hours of his exile, Dante, who wrote actuated by the spirit of revenge, and who, according to the phrase of exiles, was "waiting for better times," desired to vent his magnanimous indignation by his writings, the last weapon by which he could render himself still formidable to his insulting antagonists. He was thinking of a work in which all the names of his enemies could be registered, in which they should atone, with eternal ignominy, for all the wrongs he had to endure. He wanted a conception unlimited as his rage; he wanted an invisible world, in which the world he lived in should be judged and sentenced after his own prepossessions.

There was among the plans contemplated before his exile, an idea, yet only the embryo of a most vast idea, that admirably suited his design. Whence that primitive plan might be derived, it would now be as useless as difficult to state. The formless performances of some of the legends and fabliaux of French minstrels, even if they could be alleged as models from which the first project of a mysterious journey to the kingdoms of eternity might have been suggested, can be no disparagement to the claims of Dante to original invention. The Vision of Frate Alberigo, a monk of the Monte Cassino,

who died in 1183, the Tesoretto of Brunetto Latini, his preceptor, or some dream or vision he really had, may, perhaps, be considered as a more immediate source from which the main idea was drawn.

But, without seeking any farther, his familiarity with the works of Virgil, his favourite poet, was most probably sufficient to give such a mind as Dante's the starting point from which he was to soar to such a prodigious height; nor was it, perhaps, without good reason that the Latin poet was chosen as leader and master through the greatest part of that eventful pilgrimage.

It seems by no means improbable that the descent of Æneas to the infernal regions, in the sixth book of the Æneid, and his affecting meeting with friends and enemies, and the oracles of the future disclosed by the ghost of his parent, and the thousand awful images by which the fecundity of the Roman bard so far enhanced the crude, primitive creation of Homer, might have struck Dante with a sudden thought: that he also could, like Æneas, "sweep adown the gulf of time," break through the limits of life, surprise the secrets of the kingdom of death, and lay them open before the gaze of mortals.

The ideas of mankind concerning life beyond life were, in those days, blended with appalling phantoms and superstitious terrors.

There was to have been a day to which the sons of man foresaw no morrow,—a day in which this globe was to be effaced from its system, and all the living at once summoned to their final account.

The year 1000, through ignorant misinterpretation of the Scriptures, had been considered as appointed by the Supreme Arbiter as the close of time. The fated period had gone by, and the world stood on its axis as firm and safe as ever. Men tried to be ashamed and to laugh at their own credulity, but the apprehensions of the Millennium were renewed at the end of each century; the institutions of the jubilee, and other religious revivals, contributed to spread a gloom upon each centennial anniversary; and death was still present with all its ghastly cortège of doubt—of dread—of never-subsiding anxiety.

It was then an inexhaustible source of poetical machinery, in the year 1300, to describe a voyage to the eternal regions, to bring among a timid and credulous multitude the tidings from heaven and hell;—for, the personifications of fiends and angels was in many instances taken

literally by the vulgar. The stupid crowd pointed at the poet as he passed, and thought they perceived, in his dark complexion and frizzled hair, the marks of his long exposure to the heat and smoke of the unquenchable fire.

It was a pious and retributive undertaking to visit the shades of men anciently or recently deceased, to paint them as undergoing the everlasting punishments which divine justice had pronounced against them; to unmask the hypocrisy of personages who had imposed upon fame, and usurped an undeserved celebrity; to restore the reputation of others, who found no rest in their tombs, struck by the blow of envy or malignity that had laid them low; to assuage the grief of a repining survivor, by showing the joy of the lamented one, if exulting among the elected; or the resignation to their doom, if cast among the reprobates; to induce guilt and wickedness to relate their own infamies in that kingdom where truth is patent; to show their pride crushed and their arrogance chastised, where man is nothing but dust and shade; to hear from the dead the prophecy of the future, and threaten the repose of the living whilst engaged in the prosecution of their worldly schemes, blindly presuming on their youth and vigour, and triumphing in all the ebriety of success.

There was a wild transport in the thought of meeting the shades of men whose names the poet had been taught to pronounce with reverence and enthusiasm—conversing with those who had died leaving behind them bitter, unavailing regrets, and insulting the tears and groans of others who had promoted, or hastened, or derided his misfortunes.

There was a rapturous excitement for a mind anxious in its yearnings after knowledge, in the expectation of seeing the most arduous, inaccessible truths unveiled, and being enabled to spread among men his own conjectures, as sanctioned by what he had seen or heard in that place where is the end of all doubts.

He will go—he will see—he will ascertain; he will quench his long thirst at the fountain of truth, and clothing that truth in all the magical charms of poetry, make it a law among mortals.

Is there not in heaven an angel praying for him—is not the love, the dream, of his childhood—the sacred flame he had treasured up in his bosom with the vigilance of a vestal,—Beatrice, constantly watching over his fate, and guiding his star like a tutelar guardian—Beatrice, the ornament of paradise—the favourite of God!

It must be Beatrice who solicits from the eternal court the grace of escorting the steps of her beloved into heaven; she will be his teacher as soon as Virgil shall have led him through the circles of the gulf of darkness, and up the steps of purgatory—as soon as he shall be purified of all human frailties, and freed from all mortal errors,—as soon as, having been plunged into the waters of life, he shall be worthy to gaze upon her face, and to steal one of her looks from the contemplation of the Eternal Being.

Such was the conception of Dante, nor ever did any man's soul so pour its whole self into one single creation, nor ever did human inspiration so far embrace all the thoughts and feelings, nor shoot so widely beyond the limits of the knowledge of his age; and the more we fix our eyes on the contemplation of that gigantic mind, we feel overwhelmed and amazed at the vastness, the boldness, the profundity of his undertaking; and we are proud that our spirit is derived from the same breath that animated his spirit, and we look towards our Maker with gratitude and dignity, praising him that he was pleased to bestow so much of his light upon one of our race.

All the political passions of the roaming

Ghibeline, all the tenderest ecstasies of the lover of Beatrice, all the deepest abstractions of the ripe scholar, all his age, all his heart, and all his mind, found place in one work; but because such influences did not act at once with the same intensity, the different parts of the poem breathe a different spirit, according as the incidents of the poet's life gave one part of his feelings the ascendancy over the others.

The first part, the *Inferno*, is nearly all dedicated to politics; it was written during the first exasperation of exile, whilst the poet was striving to raise enemies against the enemies of his cause. Ghibeline rage and Ghibeline revenge engross all his time, and, with a progressive disdain, attacking Florence, Rome, and France—the Guelphs, the Neri, Charles of Valois, and Boniface VIII.,—he restores the fame of a hundred Ghibelines, or, in the amazement of terror and pity, he conceals their crimes under the veil of a deep commiseration for their sufferings.

Hence, leaving behind the abyss of all sorrows, and breathing again the vital air, as he reaches the outskirts of the mountain of purgatory, he spreads over his rhymes a blessed calm, an ineffable abandonment. The shades he meets are breathing love and forgiveness;

they are less anxious of hearing news from the living, and only send messages of joy: the heart lightens and brightens with the different strata of the atmosphere in the rising regions of the mountain. At length, on its summit, where he has placed the terrestrial paradise, Beatrice approaches. She is coming—all that human fancy ever created falls short of the pomp and glory by which she is announced. Her lover has seen her—all earthly remembrances have forsaken him; with his eyes riveted on her eyes, he wings his flight to the spheres, attracted by her immortal looks.

There, while soaring from star to star, Beatrice reads in the mind of her lover, as in a mirror, all the doubts with which he was troubled: she gives him the solution of all problems about the system of the universe, about the inmost secrets of nature, about the most recondite mysteries of the Christian revelation; and, having thus explored the eternal light in all its emanations and reflections, Dante is allowed to turn his eyes towards the centre itself of all light, where dazzled, bewildered, and lost, he sinks, and abandons his subject, as if avowing that there is a limit even to the genius of Dante.

Thus, of the three parts into which the poem

is divided, politics are almost exclusively the subject of the first, love is the soul of the second, the third is consecrated to knowledge.

Such is the main plan of the poem; but as it is not our design to enter into any details of the works of the eminent geniuses who, by their writings, exerted the greatest influence on their respective age, we shall not dwell upon beauties that no description or illustration can enhance.

We shall not say by what art he strikes the fancy of his reader with all the horrors of the eternal gloom—how he overflows with the wildest or tenderest feelings—how he rings with all the chime of the spheres. We shall not attempt to describe the whirlwind of sounds that besiege the entrance of the kingdom of darkness, nor "the sweet colour of oriental sapphire dawning in the sky," and the "glimmering of the waves," and the "glittering of the southern stars," when landing on the shores of purgatory,—or the winged steeds of the chariot of Beatrice, or the hymns of her angelical chorus, or the smile by which she calls forth the smiles of paradise.

We shall say nothing of those fantastic, or pathetic, or majestic figures arising before us, portrayed at one stroke, such as Sordello of Mantua, or Farinata degli Uberti, or Pier delle

Vigne, or Manfred of Swabia, or of the heart-rending episodes of Francesca da Rimini, or Count Ugolino, which, clothed in all the charms of painting and sculpture, have become the property of all ages and countries.

Such is the great volume of Dante, such is the production of that primitive mind, that, rising like an immense alp above the clouds of the middle ages, created for his country a language, a poetry; who, obeying the encyclopedical taste of his age, embraced, in a vast panorama, all the opinions and errors of a dawning knowledge, and who, by an intuitive sense, seemed to unfold truths at which his age was not known to have arrived—Dante, the redeemer, the regenerator, the prophet, unheeded and forgotten in time of prosperity, resuscitated in days of adversity the glorious pyramid, the monument that was to serve as a rallying point for the sons of Italy against future dispersion.

The fame of their earliest poet had its phases in the reverence of the Italians. The first appearance of that colossal figure, so evidently framed after the type of the ancients, had upon his contemporaries a startling effect. It seemed as if by that one performance Dante had vindicated the human mind from the

charge of its gradual degeneration, and inspired modern genius with a new confidence in its own powers. "It was," to make free with the comparison of a great historian of our days, "as if in some of the ancient games, a stranger had suddenly appeared, and thrown his quoit among the marks that tradition assigned to the demigods."

But by degrees that wonder and veneration abated. The revival of Latin, in the fifteenth century, to the detriment of the national language; the idolatry for Petrarch among the numberless crowd of his cold imitators in the sixteenth; and the progressive depravation of taste and degradation of manners in the two following centuries, had finally the result of removing from Dante the attention of the universality of readers. Only in the sacred recess of some solitary mind—in the emulous aspirations of an archetypal fancy, like Michael Angelo's—in the sympathies of a heart shattered by long calamities, like Tasso's—or in the vehemence of a stern, passionate temper, like Alfieri's—could Dante find shelter and favour. His spirit loved to dwell only where it met with kindred spirits; his verses were the test to prove the existence of true elevation of soul and nobleness of heart.

The reaction by which the Italians, in our days, strive to atone for the long blindness of their reckless forefathers, the affecting devotion by which young enthusiasts are to be seen kneeling to the relics of their great father, before his tomb at Ravenna, the prodigious diffusion of his verses, and the supreme height to which his name has been replaced, speak highly to the praise of the present generation, and stand as a pledge of the renovation of their moral character, and of their ripeness for better destinies.

"O Italy! appease the manes of thy mighty dead!"

The justice that we pay to their memory can alone justify our proudest claims to their noble descent, and raise us to the emulation of their glorious examples.

CHAPTER II.

PETRARCH.

Preliminary remarks—Italian universities—The popes of Avignon—The Colonna—Petrarch's love—His coronation—Robert of Anjou—The Correggio—Cola di Rienzi—The Gonzaga—The Carrara—The Visconti—Venice and Genoa—The German emperors—Petrarch and Boccaccio—Bands of foreign soldiery—Reinstalment of the papal seat—Last years of Petrarch—His character—His works.

The poem of Dante was to Italy what the spark of the sun was to the personified clay of Prometheus. Dante gave his country a language, and language is the soul of nations. Under his powerful will his age saw with surprise a popular dialect alternately assume the loftiest tones of the sublime and pathetic, clothe the noblest and elevate the humblest conceptions, and throw light and evidence on the most abstruse and recondite truths. The

every day words and phrases of the people appeared in those verses as a new discovery, and low-born vernacular idioms were handed down to posterity as the poet's creation. The Italian language seemed to recognise the hand of its maker. Never did it, before or after, yield to any writer's impulse, never did it display more of nerve and energy, more of brevity, suppleness, and grace. As Italy was, perhaps, never more great and more free, so never since was her language nobler or mightier.

And yet the pen of Dante was a strong chisel, by a few bold strokes marking profound, indelible features, giving life to the marble wherever it touched, but abandoning the block unfinished, half-carved, half-polished, rude in its sublimity, grand in its disorder.

The charge of purifying and refining, of taming and softening, the language of Dante, was left to the care of two kindred twin minds, which, although perhaps of a stamp by a great degree inferior, yet grown on the same soil and out of the same elements, born quite at the close of Dante's tempestuous course, were to take up the mantle at the moment it fell from the prophet's shoulders, and accomplish what remained unachieved of his mission—Petrarch and Boccaccio.

This debt, under which the lovers of Laura and Fiammetta have, by their juvenile works, for ever laid their Italian posterity, must be considered as utterly distinct and independent of other and higher claims, which they have a right to extend over all civilised Europe, as the first restorers and promoters of true classic literature, as the most active instruments of modern progress, by the exhibition of the light and splendour of ancient civilisation.

The distinctions between the poet and the scholar were never in any instance more widely and definitively marked than in the case of these two illustrious contemporaries and friends; for whilst, by their Italian writings, they are justly ranked among the first fathers of the national language, it must be confessed that, by their revival of Greek and Latin learning, by their enthusiastic contemplation of the treasures of antiquity which they revealed to the wondering world, they lost sight of their native literature, and gave origin to that deplorable scholastic mania which tended for two centuries to undo the work of Dante and their own, and to give an ephemeral life to a dead language, to the detriment, and nearly to the total extinction, of the living.

The age of Dante, and that of his two noble

successors, are scarcely divided by any material interval of time, but the destinies of Italy were then hurried on with such unabating rapidity, that the whole aspect of the country was changed even in the lapse of a single generation.

The life of Petrarch offers the most striking contrast to the life of Dante.

Gifted with an easier and more equanimous temper, Petrarch steered his bark with a rare prosperity, secure in the midst of the passions of a stormy age. Placed, from the prime of his youth, at the head of the republic of letters, he enjoyed the most unlimited sway that learning alone ever gave a man. Before and after him, poets had been seen flattering princes; it was now the first and last case of a poet courted by princes. Invited to the same courts where Dante had languished in neglect and dejection, Petrarch acted the part of a mediator and arbiter, of a monitor and censor. Wherever he was, there was the best side of the cause; his presence was solicited like that of the blind old Œdipus, produced by turns by his unnatural sons, as a pledge of the justice of their claims in the eyes of the Thebans.

Petrarch lived long enough to feel weary and sick of his glory. On his brows even the laurel pressed heavily. That fame which he

had courted so long in his dazzling career, faded in his embrace, like the charms of a fairy enchantress when the spell of magic is broken.

He was among the few to whom, before death, it was given to see his name consigned to immortality, as if he had beheld it registered in the book of fame; and, in consequence of this conviction, his life was acted as if he had had all posterity for spectators.

His biography was written at full length in a large collection of Latin letters to his friends. In his most intimate expansions of familiar correspondence he wrote in the round periods of the language of Cicero, and seemed rather occupied with the public than with his friend. Nor were the living alone honoured with his correspondence; for he directed long, elaborate epistles to his favourite heroes of antiquity, and the last, not least of all, "Epistola ad Posteros," he dictated for the edification of posterity, as a man who felt well assured that posterity would be busy about him.

I could therefore be at no loss as to the materials on which the following biographical sketch should be grounded. His whole heart and soul were decomposed, as it were, in his writings; and, whatever opinion we may form

of his character, there he stands, judged and sentenced by his own words.

In that sudden political convulsion which expelled the Bianchi from Florence in 1302, and of which Dante was, as has been said, the first victim, was involved a man of noble descent, then occupying the high station of notary of the Florentine republic, called Petracco dell' Ancisa. Of him and his noble lady, Eletta Canigiani, who shared her husband's fate, Petrarch was born, in Arezzo, the 19th of July, 1304, on the very night when the Florentine exiles, with Dante and Petracco among the number, made their last ineffectual attempt upon Florence.

Petrarch tells us of himself that he had an opportunity of seeing Dante at his paternal house, in Arezzo, in his seventh year, and the stern features of that solitary genius seem to have left upon his mind an indelible impression among the colourless dreams of his infancy.

Following the destinies of his father, the future poet was conveyed to the court of the pope in Avignon, and was successively sent for his studies to Carpentras, Montpellier, and Bologna, where the old notary intended to direct him through the legal studies, to tread in the career of his father.

The Italian universities followed at this

period, their learned pursuits with unabating fervour. Placed in the heart of populous and turbulent towns, they enjoyed, within the recess of their walls, a comparative calm and security. Learning was, like religion, a common property, a subject of universal veneration which it was equally the interest of all parties to honour and favour.

Unfortunately those literary establishments, from the very tenor of their original constitution, formed themselves into a party, and operated a division in the state. The spirit of caste and corporation, indivisible from a social order, hardly emancipated from misrule and anarchy, kept them constantly wrangling and wrestling for their privileges against the encroachments of other equally jealous, equally ambitious, equally powerful bodies; so that it was not unfrequent to see the university halls broken in by the populace, who made a bonfire of the chairs and benches, and drove professors and students from town to town.

The university of Bologna, the most ancient in Italy, if not in Europe, continued, notwithstanding the excommunications of Clement V. in 1306, the most frequented and famous.

The memory of Irnerius and of Accursius, in the thirteenth century, gave that town an

undisputed ascendency over the studies of civil and canon law, in that age the most important and most influential of all learned pursuits.

One of the greatest luminaries of the law-school of Bologna, when Petrarch was sent there for his studies, was Cino da Pistoia, a profound scholar and an eminent poet, who, obliged to leave his native town in consequence of the civil feuds of Bianchi and Neri, increased the number of those Tuscan wandering *fuorusciti*, who were then to be found all over Europe.

Another of Petrarch's kindest masters was Giovanni Andrea da Bologna, whose taste for Pandects and Decretals seemed to pass as an inheritance to his children, even of the gentler sex; if we are, at least, to believe the legend of his daughter, Novella, who, in the prime of her age, was so far proficient in such arid studies as to fill the professor's chair, during her father's absence, and deliver her lectures; taking, however, good care to screen her lovely face behind a curtain, "lest her beauty should turn those young heads she was appointed to edify and enlighten."

It is, however, but justice to remark, that the story is equally applied to one of Accursius' daughters, and that the names of other ladies

occur among the list of doctors at Bologna, where a young beauty, clad in a professor's gown, is not, even in more recent ages, a spectacle utterly unexampled.*

Meanwhile the irresistible turn for classical literature, for which Petrarch had already endured his parent's displeasure at Montpellier —where the scene between Ovid and his father was acted over again—was hardly to be expected to abate in Italy, and especially at Bologna, where Cino himself was looked upon as the sweetest of living poets, and continued to his last day to dote on women and sing for love. The example of his benevolent instructor, his familiarity with classic models, and his intercourse with many of the ardent Italian youth at the university, many of whom remained his friends or patrons for life, hastened the deve-

* Accursius, disciple and rival of Azzo, one of the pupils of Irnerius, the greatest of Italian lawyers in the Middle Ages, was born at Florence in 1151 or 1182; died, 1229 or 1250. His great work, "Corpus Juris Glossatum," was first printed 1529. His son, Francis Accursius, was equally eminent.—Cino da Pistoia banished from his native city in consequence of the disturbances of Bianchi and Neri, 1307; appointed professor at Bologna, 1314; was equally a professor at Treviso, Perugia, and Florence; died, 1336.—John Andrea of Bologna, born in Tuscany, professor at Padua, 1330; called to Bologna, 1332; died of the plague, 1348.—Bartolus and Baldus, both pupils of Cino, flourished about the middle of the fourteenth century.

lopement of Petrarch's precocious genius, so that, when recalled to Avignon, in his twenty-second year, and, by the death of both parents, left master of himself, he gave full scope to his juvenile inclinations, and set out, with all the impetuosity of an ardent temper, on his way to immortality.

Avignon was, in that epoch, the seat of the papal government, which the turbulence of the Roman factions and the policy of Philip of Valois had removed from Rome since the year 1305. The world was yet to witness something more depraved than the court of Rome, and that was the court of Avignon. The grandeur of the papal seat seemed to be eclipsed, when it ceased to be environed by the majesty of Rome. The French popes rivalled, indeed even surpassed, the Italian pontiffs in deception and perfidy, in luxury, in avarice, in every shape and manner of vice; but the dignity and authority, the strength of mind, the headstrong independence, the daring ambition, which had humbled monarchs before the successors of St. Peter, were not virtues to be so easily inherited.

Placed under reach of French influence, under pretext of protection, the French popes acceded to the slightest wishes of royalty with

cowardly connivance. Already Clement V. had blindly gratified the vengeance of Philip the Fair by the foul assassination of the Knights Templars in 1311. John XXII., his successor, shared the tithes of the church with the rapacious Philip of Valois, while, by an open sale of indulgences, of all ecclesiastical honours and dignities, he defrayed the expenses of a court as extravagant and licentious as it was corrupt and venal.

It was thus from his earliest youth that Petrarch's upright and generous soul was brought into contact with what vice could exhibit most revolting and hideous; and notwithstanding his frequent invectives and execrations of that scandalous court, it would be painful for his admirers to see him so long and so often take his residence in Avignon, were it not well known how sadly, from his earliest youth, the poet laboured under tender and somewhat morbid sensibilities, which seldom allowed him to follow the soundest dictates of his reason.

The first object of attraction to the papal court was his friendship for a Roman youth of his own age, whom Petrarch had first seen at Bologna. This was Jacopo Colonna, one of that haughty family who, in the absence of

the popes, exercised an absolute supremacy in Rome.

This family, one of the few scattered scions referring their origin to the Roman patricians of old, had for several centuries been signalised in all its branches by such traits of hardihood and magnanimity, as well could justify their claims to that noble descent. In all their pursuits, whether ecclesiastic or military, they carried along with them that martial spirit, that undaunted resolution, which their ancestors bore on their shield, together with their proud motto, "Columna flecti nescio," and which decided all differences in their favour.

The memory was not quite extinct of that warlike Cardinal Colonna, who followed the crusaders to their conquest of Egypt, and who, after prodigies of valour, taken prisoner under the walls of Damietta, and condemned by the Saracens to be sawed through the body, put so serene a look on the preparations for that awful torture, as to disarm the native ferocity of his executioners, who rewarded his heroism by granting him life and liberty, and dismissed him with every demonstration of honour and regard.

The Colonna had reached their height of prosperity under the pontificate of Nicholas IV.,

one of their name, in 1288; but in later times, dispersed and banished by the treacherous rancour of Boniface VIII., they had been forced to take shelter in France; when Sciarra Colonna, entering into the interests of Philip the Fair, accompanied by a few French barons, at the head of his partisans, had surprised and arrested the false pope in Anagni, menaced and struck him with his iron gauntlet; so that, though soon rescued by the fanaticism of the populace, Boniface died in a few days, in a paroxysm of powerless rage.*

At the head of the family was now Stephano, brother of Sciarra, a hoary warrior, after the antique Roman cast, father of ten sons, two of whom, Cardinal Giovanni and the above-mentioned Jacopo, resided at the pope's court in Avignon.

The last a young prelate, scarcely issued from the university, showed himself worthy of his race by his spirited conduct at Rome in 1328, at the epoch of the descent of Louis IV., who, having, by intrigues and treasons, gained over a council of schismatic bishops to his cause, received from them the golden crown, in opposition to pope John XXII.: when young

* A. D. 1303.

Colonna, followed only by four attendants, read in St. John of Lateran the papal bull of excommunication with drawn sword, offering himself ready to support against the emperor and his adherents, the rights of the pope, and the justice of his cause.

Such was Petrarch's earliest friend, who, having introduced him to the cardinal, his brother, in a house which was then the resort of all the papal court had most conspicuous and select, soon called upon him the attention of the whole college of cardinals, and the pope himself. Petrarch's natural advantages of personal comeliness and captivating manners, united to the early display of eminent talents, and to a constant though unobtrusive desire of pleasing, rendered him soon a desirable acquaintance among the best circles, while his gentle and loving disposition secured for him a popularity seldom attendant on rapid and dazzling success.

But another argument, more powerful than either friendship or juvenile love of fame and ambition, was soon to bind Petrarch more indissolubly to the dangerous sojourn of Avignon.

He had seen Laura.

This memorable event, which he took good

care to register in his works in prose and verse, in Latin and Italian, with scrupulous accuracy, took place in the church of Ste Claire, in Avignon, early in the morning of Good Friday, April 6, 1327, the poet being then in his twenty-third year.

It is not my intention to write over again, for the thousandth time, the love-romance of Petrarch and Laura: I shall only venture so far as to express the utter scepticism into which every impartial critic must be naturally led, after consulting all authorities within his reach, concerning the object of Petrarch's flame; for it cannot, according to my opinion, be quite satisfactorily demonstrated, whether the poet was in love with a single woman, or with a "wise and dutiful wife sorely tyrannized by her jealous husband, and mother of a numerous family," as, upon the authority of an awkward abbreviation in a paltry old parchment, it had been rather hastily asserted. Nor is it well determined whether Petrarch's own assurances are to be taken literally, and we are to believe his love to have been of that pure, unsubstantial, platonic cast he depicted, or rather of that mixture of gallantry and voluptuousness, of devotion and extravagance, which was called love among the knights and troubadours of his age.

I shall not, however, go so far in my doubts as to call the very existence of the fair lady in question, as some have done before me.

It seems indeed impossible not to admit that, whoever she might be, there was a Laura; that is—a woman so named, known as a reigning beauty of a court that could boast to have assembled all the proudest beauties of Europe —on whom, for a long time, indeed for his whole life, a few intervals of innocent diversion and solace always excepted, all Petrarch's thoughts and faculties were absorbed and centered.

This passion, during its first stage, seemed so completely to overwhelm him, that he found no remedy against it but absence. In 1330 he followed his friend Jacopo Colonna to his episcopal residence in Lombez, who had recently been raised to that see by the gratitude of the pope, and in remuneration of his intrepid behaviour in Rome, to which we have before alluded.

He revisited Avignon in the following year, but soon left, bound on a short excursion to Paris, whence he crossed over to Flanders and a part of Germany. "He delighted," he said, "in visiting new lands, and studying manners and feelings in remote regions, to compare them with

what he remembered of the land that gave him birth; and although he did visit many magnificent countries, the longer and farther he travelled the fonder and prouder he grew of his Italian name; as every country, if compared with Italy, appeared to be plunged into darkness and barbarism."

After a sojourn of several years in Avignon, where his voice began to assume a considerable ascendency over the events of his age, listening to his fondness for classical antiquity, to his patriotism, and to his friendship for the Colonna, he sailed from Marseilles for Rome, where the enthusiasm that the remnants of the old Roman monuments, the temples, forums, and theatres of the City of Ruins raised in his heart, cannot be conceived or described by any one who does not, like Petrarch, live more in the past than the present.

Restored to Avignon, he purchased a cottage and garden in a secluded spot, which he had from his childhood been induced by his father, and, in after life, led by his choice to visit and revisit, and in which he had occasionally fixed his residence, previous to his journey to Rome.

This was the too famous solitude of Vaucluse, which I shall take good care not to describe,

as there is hardly a human being who has not at least heard of, "the favourite haunts of the poet of love, where the music of his sonnets and songs is still hovering on the balmy air, and the rivulets have learned to imitate the murmur of his sighs."

His fondness for retirement, however, and his all-absorbing passion for Laura, did not make him unmindful of fame.

He was then busy with his Latin poem, "Africa;" a few of the cantos were already in circulation, and the report of their excellencies was sufficient to call him to that distinction, to which he had scarcely dared to aspire in his youthful dreams of ambition—his coronation on the Capitol.

The custom of crowning poets, general among the ancients, had been recently established at the restoration of letters, and the same honour had been already conferred, early in the fourteenth century, on more than one poet and scholar, whose names as well as their crowns, in spite of the incorruptibility of their leaves, are now fading and mouldering beneath the dust of their tombs.

But, at the crowning of Petrarch, it was the poet who honoured the laurel; and though we would not take upon ourselves to assert that

Petrarch did not manage, through the medium of his friends, to obtain his intent, yet the very fact of two letters being contemporaneously sent to him for that purpose, the one from the Roman senate, the other from the chancellor of the university of Paris, (an Italian and one of his friends,) is sufficient to prove that he had only to express the slightest wish to be sure that the noblest of the learned corporations of Europe would strive to secure that honour for themselves.

His classical and patriotic predilections and the insinuations of Cardinal Colonna, having decided him in favour of the Roman invitation, he landed at Naples early in 1341, where King Robert of Anjou was on the look out for his arrival.

Robert was the third of the successors of Charles of Anjou, and was the wisest and most accomplished monarch of that dynasty. He had, in his youth, pursued the career of arms and politics, with more ardour and ambition than skill or success. He was now, in his decline, entirely engrossed by the more genial pursuits of the arts of peace. Surrounded with books and scholars at home and abroad, opening schools and libraries all over his states, encouraging and enlarging the univer-

sity of Naples, which had languished since it was first founded under the auspices of the Emperor Frederic II. nearly a century before; he embellished his throne with all the lustre that letters and arts can confer upon a court.

It could hardly be expected that so liberal a prince—the Solomon of his age, as Boccaccio styled him, should remain indifferent to the glory of Petrarch. He had, in fact, long since entered into correspondence with him, and consulted him on matters of the highest moment, through the kind mediation of Dionysius de Robertis, a celebrated orator, poet, philosopher, theologian, astrologer; a scholar, in fine, according to the ideas of the age, a native of Florence, but likewise, in accordance with the manners of the age, wandering all his life in quest of knowledge, with whom Petrarch had been in terms of cordial intimacy during his stay in Paris. It was, without doubt, to King Robert and to this generous friend, that Petrarch owed the invitation of the Roman senate, and through a sentiment of—perhaps in some degree affected—modesty, he repaired to the court of Naples with a view to undergo a thorough examination by the king himself, from which it might appear how far he was indeed entitled by his learning to the honour that

awaited him. The experiment lasted three days, and was open to the public; it turned upon all the topics that constituted the *scibile* of the age.

Some of the cantos of the poem "Africa" were read by the bard to his patron, who was so delighted with it, that he requested to receive the dedication of the poem whenever it should be drawn to a close. Petrarch promised it, and kept his word, though neither did the good king live, nor did he himself persevere, to see the end of the work; for incomplete the work did certainly remain, and there is no doubt that its author never thought of giving it the last finish, and was even said to have left an order—probably in imitation of Virgil—that the poem should, after his death, be consigned to the flames—an order which he well knew never would, and, considering the many copies already in circulation, never could be executed.

The honours that the Neapolitan monarch and his court bestowed upon the candidate during the period of trial, could be only eclipsed by the splendour and magnificence of his reception at Rome.

Dressed in royal garb—King Robert having presented him with his own robe—surrounded with all the pomp and pageant of royalty, Petrarch reached the eternal city, which,

decked with all the majesty of olden times, poured forth, in one mass, to meet him. Deafened by the shouts and plaudits of that always fierce and stormy multitude, he rode to the Capitol, where the senator, his friend, Orso dell' Anguillara, was, with his own hand, to perform the solemn ceremony. Twelve young patricians in white garments followed, proclaiming the glory of the bard and singing his verses. The Colonna, and the proudest Roman families, marched in his suite. The discords of those haughty barons seemed, for a moment, suspended—the chains that pressed upon the people relaxed—and the great metropolis assumed its ancient character of grandeur for a scene that was never before or after equalled in Italy.

This far-famed solemnity took place on Easter day, April 8th, 1340.

The poet was then in his thirty-seventh year, and his countenance, beaming with inspiration, preserved still so much of its soft and rather feminine beauty, as to conciliate the suffrages of that part of the spectators who had no better test than those external advantages by which to estimate his worth.

It cannot be denied that the Italians, even of the lowest classes, excel every other people in

Europe in the instinctive awe which they seem to feel in the presence of genius, and that nowhere does eminent talent meet with more unanimous and enthusiastic homage than in Italy, where, without remounting to happier ages, it may well be remembered how, even in our time, the arrival of Byron and Scott in any of the large towns throughout the country, was an event calculated to produce a sensation certainly not inferior to what we have seen excited by the visit of a Russian prince among the best circles of free-born Britons in London, or by the appearance of the Prince of Joinville at a public ball among the republicans of New York.

Immediately after the ceremony Petrarch started for Avignon, where he longed to lay his laurel wreath at the feet of that proud beauty, for whose sake alone that crown seemed to have any value in his eyes. He travelled, however, by land, probably that he might enjoy a triumphant march through Italy; and having put up for a few days at the court of Azzo da Correggio, Lord of Parma, he by his earnest instances, deviated from his former purpose, and was gradually induced to choose his residence on the sunny side of the Alps.

Azzo was the son of Giberto da Correggio,

who had usurped, and with various vicissitudes held, the supreme authority in Parma from 1295 to 1313. His son, who had shared his father's fortunes and reverses, had been called to reassume, in 1321, the sovereignty of Parma, which he contrived to secure in his grasp by the same arts and policy that had secured his father's success; by adroitly shifting from the Guelph to the Ghibeline party, by rousing and fomenting civil discords and jealousies, and by all the resources of an easy conscience and accommodating faith.

Azzo had to struggle especially against two noble antagonists, Piero and Marsilio, brothers de Rossi, the first especially considered as the most valiant and accomplished knight, and the ablest general in Italy. There had been in 1335 a brief suspension of hostilities, and the contest had been brought before the supreme tribunal of Pope Benedict XII. in Avignon, when Petrarch, for the first time and the last, brushing up what he still remembered of his legal studies, donned a barrister's gown, and pleaded the cause of Azzo, his friend, with so much zeal and unction, as could easily prove that he might have claimed the best title to the name of the most eloquent orator, had he not preferred the glory of the greatest poet of his age.

It was this important service that Azzo da Correggio, a grateful, but in every other respect an unworthy friend of Petrarch, intended to remunerate, when, by pressing invitations, and by some ecclesiastical dignities which he caused to be conferred upon him, he attached the laureate poet to his court. Petrarch built in Parma a house, which is still to be seen standing, and sought in the neighbourhood a silent, humble hermitage in the solitude of *Selva Piana* which he called his Cisalpine Parnassus, in opposition to his Transalpine Parnassus of Vaucluse.

To Vaucluse, however, and to his much-dreaded no less than much-cherished Avignon, the course of political events was soon to drive him once more.

Benedict XII. was dead, and Clement VI. had been raised to the pontificate.* The Roman senate sent a deputation charged with the mission of complimenting the new pope, and soliciting his return to his Italian metropolis. Petrarch, now decorated with the rights and privileges of Roman citizenship, was invited to join the deputies, among whom he found his friend, the too famous Cola da Rienzi, whom he had first seen in Rome at the epoch

* A.D. 1342

of his coronation. The deputation failed; but the liberal, though unprincipled pontiff, did not fail to honour and reward the two friends who had by turns assumed the office of spokesmen; and Petrarch, enriched by new ecclesiastical sinecures, cast his anchor once more in Avignon.

His excellent friend, King Robert, had, meanwhile, died at Naples,* and his sceptre had fallen into the tender and inexperienced hands of that more wretched than guilty, "more sinned against than sinning," Joan of Naples, the Mary Stuart of Italy. Petrarch, sent to the court of Joan by Pope Clement on a mission, in which he but poorly succeeded, returned disappointed and exhausted to his Cisalpine Parnassus in Parma.

There he was involved in all the horrors and tumults of a ruthless war, kindled by the intrigues and perfidies of Azzo da Correggio, who had bartered his sovereignty of Parma, to the Visconti of Milan and the Este of Ferrara, defrauding both with every kind of perjury, and robbing his own brothers of their share in the bargain. Released from the trances of terror and suspense, into which the distracted state of Lombardy had plunged him, he crossed the

* A.D. 1343.

Alps, and arrived safe in Avignon, though not without infinite dangers and hair-breadth escapes.

But the habit of wandering had become in him a second nature, and he began now to shift his residence, without any plausible reason, as if obeying the impulse of an irresistible necessity.

In the course of that same year he was in Parma once more, where not having found his patron, Azzo da Correggio, who, now a dethroned and banished prince, had taken shelter in Verona, to Verona he directed his course. There reigned in Verona in those days, Mastino, nephew of Cane della Scala, who had inherited the valour and ambition, but not the splendour and magnanimity, of his predecessor. The name of this Mastino is disgraced by the record of awful crimes, and the hand which he probably stretched to the roaming poet was stained with the blood of his nephew, an archbishop, whom he had, only a few years before, slain on the threshold of the sanctuary. The crimes of stabbing and poisoning were ever since perpetuated in this reprobate family of the Scaligeri, who, as one of their biographers observes, "perished like a race of mad *dogs* and *mastiffs*, tearing each other to pieces, with the very rage of the animals from which they seemed so fond of borrowing their names."

The sojourn of Petrarch in Verona was, however, of the shortest duration.

Early in 1346, he is found once more in his solitude of Vaucluse, from whence he hardly ever stirred, until he was roused, in the following year, by an unexpected event, that reawakened all his predilections for Italy.

The brilliant though ephemeral episode of his friend Rienzi, the last of the tribunes, was then acting at Rome. How egregiously Petrarch, as well as the soberest spirits of the age, plunged into the tribune's dreams and illusions, we need not repeat. A new light and interest has been recently thrown on the subject, and all the details of that momentous revolution have been with great force at least, if not always with impartiality and discernment, laid before the English readers, in one of those works of fiction that assume, in our days, the office of history.

Not satisfied with encouraging the tribune's efforts by his epistles and exhortations, or with warmly advocating his friend's cause at the court of Avignon, where Rienzi could not fail to have bitter opponents, Petrarch resolved to join him at Rome, and once more bade adieu to Avignon.

The pope offered him the office of apostolical

secretary—his friends gathered around him in sorrow and tears—Cardinal Colonna reproached him with levity and ingratitude—Laura, as if aware that they parted for ever, cast a fond, lingering glance after him, and turned pale—he felt, in short, as if his heart were torn from him as he left,—but he left.

Had Petrarch's sound judgment and his unerring sense of equity been opportunely associated with the prestige of Rienzi's eloquence and enthusiasm, had the poet thrown his laurel in the balance of the destinies of Italy, no man can ascertain what might have proved the final result of that abortive attempt; for we can have no doubt that Rome and Italy were then not quite ripe for the yoke of servitude, and that, on the other hand, they were too sadly distracted by factions to enjoy the blessings of liberty, and abide under the empire of the laws.

How it might have happened had Petrarch arrived in time, certain it is that nothing awaited him in Italy but disappointment and woe.

No sooner had he landed at Genoa, than he heard of the massacre of the Colonna and all the rest of the Roman nobility. The infatuated tribune assumed the tone and manners of an absolute dictator, and rushed on with the inconsiderate violence of a man drunk with

prosperity. The multitude soon recovered from their blind fanaticism, and broke their idol with as much precipitation as they had raised him on their altars.

Laying aside his projected journey to Rome, the poet wandered all the rest of that year between Verona, Padua, and Parma.

The following year, 1348, arose in darkness and gloom.

Bereft already of some of his bosom friends, (nominally of Dionysius de Robertis, and of Jacopo Colonna, the bishop of Lombez, 1344,) humbled by the downfal of long cherished hopes, alarmed by violent earthquakes and other public calamities, his inborn timidity awakened by a thousand ominous presentiments —for, like many a great man of antiquity, he believed himself privileged with the forewarnings of heaven:—he was witnessing the ravages that the too famous pestilence of 1348 was carrying on under his eyes, when tidings upon tidings reached him of his irreparable losses in Avignon. Cardinal Colonna and—Laura.

Laura died suddenly on the 6th of April, in the same month, day, and hour in which Petrarch had seen her, for the first time, in the church of St. Claire, in Avignon, and twenty-one years after that remarkable event.

After her death, Petrarch, who was doomed

to survive her twenty-six years, could hardly find rest anywhere.

From Parma, where the mortal announcement found him, he started again for Verona, and hence for Mantua. At Mantua he was hospitably received by Louis of Gonzaga, one of that family who, avenging the outrage offered to a lady of their name, by the murder of Passerino Bonacassi, Lord of Mantua, had, in 1328, snatched from him the sceptre of that city, which remained in their hands till the middle of the eighteenth century.

From Mantua, Petrarch travelled to Parma, whence, in 1350, he undertook a pilgrimage to Rome on the recurrence of the jubilee. He was waited upon by Giovanni Boccaccio, his friend, on his passage through Florence; and was greeted with the warmest reception in Arezzo at his return, where he was shown the very house he was born in, preserved as a holy shrine by public veneration, and pointed out to strangers as the pride of the city.

Continuing his journey to the northward, Petrarch returned to Padua, where he found the court and city plunged into mourning by the perpetration of a domestic tragedy.

Padua obeyed, since the beginning of the fourteenth century, the rule of the lords of Carrara. Jacopo, second of that name, who

had, in 1345, opened his way to the throne through treason and murder, had just fallen himself, a victim to the vengeance of his nephews. Francesco da Carrara, who had already commenced his reign by confining his cousin and uncle in a dungeon, where they both found their death, hastened to assure Petrarch that he was no less welcome to the court of Padua than he ever had been under his predecessor.

Florence meanwhile, acknowledging too late, and repenting her injustice towards the greatest of her citizens, Dante, and raising, as it were by way of atonement, altars in her schools to his memory, had revoked the decree of banishment and confiscation passed against Petracco and his family, and solicited—Boccaccio himself being charged with the mission—the return of Petrarch, inviting him to the direction of her newly-established university.

Petrarch crossed over to Avignon.

He continued in Avignon to enjoy credit and favour till the death of Clement VI., when, in 1353, having been held in dread and mistrust by the new pope, Innocent VI., a rude, illiterate Frenchman, who dreaded, in the poet, an adept in witchcraft, as Virgil, said the good pope, had been before him, Petrarch recrossed the Alps, and repaired to the court of the Visconti at Milan.

The grandeur of the Visconti had been laid on a solid basis, ever since Otho, Archbishop of Milan, a warlike prelate of that family, had, by several discomfitures, dispersed the Guelph Della Torre in 1277. Their power had, notwithstanding some severe checks, been always on the increase in consequence of the ascendency of the superior valour of Matteo and Azzo, and through the crafty and unscrupulous ambition of Luchino Visconti. This last having been poisoned by his wife in 1349, the sceptre had fallen into the hands of the Archbishop Giovanni Visconti, who wielded it with more than priestly hands.

This proud and cunning prelate, who united to the lordly titles of his family the supreme ecclesiastical dignity of the state, who had received the legates of the pope brandishing a crosier in his left hand and a sword in the other, giving them to understand that he was ready to support his rights with either, was now without the shade of a rival among the most eminent Ghibeline leaders.* Already Parma and Bologna, Genoa and Pisa, had, either under the title of alliance or patronage, been added to the ample heritage of his fathers; even the republic of Florence was threatened with imminent ruin.

* A. D. 1352.

Such was the prince at whose court Petrarch was, by the most urgent entreaties, compelled to reside; nor had he sooner consented to be his guest, than the archbishop created him his ambassador, and despatched him to Venice to bring about a cessation of hostilities between that republic and Genoa.

Venice and Genoa, after the downfal of the maritime power of Pisa in 1284, disputed, rather than divided, the empire of the sea. The two emulous republics had already, in many a naval encounter, stained the Mediterranean and the Black Sea with the best of their blood. The pride of Venice had been sorely humbled at Corzuola in 1288, but the strife had lately broken open afresh, and Paganino Doria, one of the many heroes of that formidable name, was measuring his forces against Nicolo Pisani, the Venetian admiral, with various success.

Genoa had then given the supreme power of the state to the Archbishop of Milan; and Petrarch, who, in all these brotherly feuds, never failed to act the part of universal peacemaker, and who had already in vain exhorted the two inimical parties to a reconciliation, appeared now at Venice, bound to the same purpose, invested with a new official character, true to the same mission to which he seemed so eminently appointed by Heaven, invariably turning

his credit and ascendency to what he believed to be the cause of justice and humanity.

There ruled then at Venice the doge Andrea Dandolo, than whose name none sounded more high and glorious in Italy—one of the greatest warriors and statesmen, as well as the first historiographer of his country. An admirer as he was of Petrarch's learning and genius, and long since numbered among his most intimate friends, Dandolo continued, however, inexorable in his hostile designs against Genoa. The ambassador was courted and honoured, but his mediation was received with a levity little short of raillery and contempt, and the struggle was carried on with mutual inveteracy. The fortune of Doria and Genoa prevailed. Venice, exhausted by repeated disasters, was compelled to sue for peace, and it was granted on such hard terms, that the generous heart of the doge broke under the disgrace of his country, and—such was then Italian patriotism—died of sorrow ere he signed the treaty.*

In the following year, ere Venice had recovered from these external calamities, she was threatened with final destruction by the conspiracy of her new doge, Marino Faliero. But

* War of the Bosphorus, Nicolo Pisani defeated by Paganino Doria, February 13, 1352.—New conquests of Doria on the coast of Morea, November 13, 1354.

that republic had found its palladium in the disinterested patriotism of its permanent aristocracy, who, after the closing of the grand council in 1297, had given the government that steadiness and vitality that preserved it among the wrecks of all Italian states, almost to our days.

The war of Chiozza, which followed soon after* and nearly brought Venice to the very brink of ruin, ended by strengthening her power and securing her prosperity.

The Archbishop of Milan had, meanwhile, suddenly died, (October 1354,) and his three nephews, Matteo, Bernabò, and Galeazzo, divided his vast states between them. Matteo soon perished, most probably by the hands of his brothers, and the three shares were thus reduced to two. Petrarch continued to enjoy the same hospitality at the court of Galeazzo, the mildest and most accomplished of the two brothers; and who, after Petrarch's suggestion, was the founder of the university of Pavia.

The Visconti seemed to have bound fortune

* War of Chiozza.—Vittor Pisani defeated at Pola, by Luciano Doria, and thrown into prison by the order of the Senate, May 29, 1379.—Taking of Chiozza by Pietro Doria, who was bent on the utter extermination of Venice, August 6.—Vittor Pisani restores the wavering spirits of his countrymen.—Carlo Zeno comes to the rescue of the besieged city. The Genoese are compelled to surrender, June 1380.

to their chariot." Allied to the royal houses of England and France, they were enabled to brave the cowardly Cæsars, who were now disgracing the sceptre of Germany. To Henry VII., who died in Italy in 1313, had succeeded Louis IV. of Bavaria, who, after betraying friends and enemies in his invasion of 1327, had carried along with him, in his retreat, the gold and execration of Italy. Nor had the descent of John of Bohemia, in 1333, any more fortunate result, notwithstanding the valour and courtesy of that monarch, and the enthusiasm of the Italians for him. It was now the turn of his son Charles IV., who, having assumed the imperial purple in 1347, made also his attempt upon Italy in 1354. He appeared on the Alps unarmed and unattended, reckoning, like all his predecessors, on Italian discords and jealousies. The Lombard and Tuscan lords rallied, in fact, around his standard; but, after having rewarded them by every manner of extortion and treachery, he hurried back to Germany, leaving behind him plague, famine, and utter desolation, wherever he passed.

This emperor was also one of Petrarch's illustrious friends. The poet had seen him while he was still only Charles of Luxemburg, in 1346, in Avignon, where the gallant prince had, in his presence and before the whole court,

kissed his Laura's forehead and eyes, "in so sweet a manner," says the poet, "that he was seized with envy at the sight." Petrarch had afterwards written to the emperor at his accession, a long, eloquent Latin epistle, inviting him, who by his intimacy with the pope was best calculated to conciliate the suffrages of Guelph and Ghibeline, to cross the Alps, to the pacification of Italy. That letter remained, for some unaccountable reason, for three years unanswered; but Petrarch, nothing discouraged, forwarded a second exhortation in 1354; which, backed as it was by splendid offers of Venetian gold, prevailed, as we have said, upon the emperor, and induced him to take a journey of which Italy paid so dearly the expenses.

Surrendering to the emperor's bidding, Petrarch met him at Mantua, and continued for several weeks his guest and intimate counsellor. But the differences that soon arose between Charles and the Visconti prevented the poet from accompanying the emperor to Rome, where he was desired to honour, by his attendance, the ceremony of his coronation. Petrarch parted with Charles at Placentia, and joined his patron at Milan.

In the following year, 1356, the poet ambassador was charged with a mission to Germany to reconcile the good will of the emperor,

who, having now retreated to Germany, still menaced the Visconti and Italy with a second invasion. Again, in 1360, he crossed the Alps, on his way to the court of King John of France, to congratulate him on his deliverance from English captivity. The French king and the German emperor, as well as indeed every prince who ever saw or heard of Petrarch, strove by splendid offers to lay the strongest temptations in the path of the ambassador to prevent his return. But he had, by this time, too many arguments of attachment to his own Italy, to be longer detained by any solicitation from abroad.

It is but to do justice to Petrarch's memory to say, that the constant favour of the great never dazzled his judgment with a frivolous fondness for pomp or luxury. He had made fame his idol,—he wished for no distinction but what was attached to his name—he aspired to no power but what arose from his popularity. Thus, wearied with the splendour of the gay court of Galeazzo, he sought his retreat in a small villa near the Adda, three miles from Milan, which (as he was pleased to do with his own and his best friends' name, recasting them so as to give them the sound of Greek and Roman antiquity,)—he designated under the classical name of *Linternum*, where he buried

himself among his books, and received the visits of lords and monarchs with a plainness and frugality which he well knew made a happy contrast with the lustre and prestige of his name.

A dearer, perhaps, though a humbler visit, he received in 1359, in the person of his early friend Giovanni Boccaccio, with whom he had never ceased to entertain a warm, not less than a learned correspondence, ever since their first meeting at the court of King Robert in Naples, at the epoch of his coronation.

The intimacy of these two illustrious men of letters, who moved during their life in two far different orbits, but whose merits are, in the eyes of posterity, more than fairly balanced, has a peculiar charm for us, when we think of the acrimony and inveteracy of literary dissensions in the following ages.

Boccaccio, the plain citizen of a commercial republic, looked up with a feeling of deference to Petrarch, the favourite of tyrants and popes, and bowed before the laurel that shaded his brows. But his very modesty and unconsciousness of his own powers, his unaffected diffidence, his disinterested attachment, and a conformity of tastes and pursuits, won the good will of the more aspiring mind of the poet of Laura, whose fault was rather excess than lack

of warmth and cordiality in his intercourse with his familiars.

The interchange of books and manuscripts, the joy with which they communicated to each other every new discovery of classical works as a subject of common triumph, the kind advices and remonstrances of which they were liberal to each other, and even the occasional subventions with which Petrarch ran to the rescue of his friend when harassed by pecuniary difficulties, had incessantly contributed to strengthen their union, and render them necessary to each other.

There was only one point in which the two friends found each other often at variance, and on which the upright, unyielding conduct of the good republican story-teller baffled the specious eloquence and the artful caressing manners of the court poet; and that was the very circumstance of his being a court poet, of his living under the patronage of such hideous tyrants as Bernabò and Galeazzo Visconti, and his residing with the members of a family who, from their first rise, had never ceased to lay every kind of snare against the tranquillity of his (Boccaccio's) beloved Florentine republic, and to conspire with its most inveterate Italian or foreign adversaries to its destruction.

Boccaccio saw likewise with pain, that the

name of the poet who had been for him "the first light to shoot upon his mind," whose glory he had, by his exertions, restored in Florence—the name of Dante, gave visible uneasiness to the jealous vanity of Petrarch, who had, however, the least occasion in the world to envy the reputation of any man, dead or living. Petrarch shrank and smarted under the alleged grievances, and could ill withstand the frankness and plainness of his inexorable monitor. On these occurrences he had recourse rather to the arts of persuasion than conviction. He overwhelmed his friend's judgment by the expansion of ardent, irresistible sympathies; he silenced him by the same arguments which he, doubtless, employed to lay his own conscience at rest.

War, plague, and famine, in those ages inseparable scourges, meanwhile frightened the poet from his humble rural retreat. Bands of disorderly soldiers, chiefly composed of foreign adventurers, French, German, and English, after passing from the service of one prince to another, not unfrequently betraying, robbing, and plundering their employers—in time of peace, carried on war on their own account, and laid waste the whole country with appalling executions. Styling themselves "enemies of God, of mercy and pity," declaring war "to all

the world," those leaders of robbers, whose mad presumption was hardly inferior to their brutal ferocity, began to anticipate the day in which the fairest of countries was hopelessly to lie at their mercy. The Italians who, obeying the impulse of a precocious civilisation, and their eagerness for less sanguinary pursuits, had too hastily laid down their sword, neglected and given up the trade of arms to those ultramontane ruffians, who had nothing but their own blood to traffic upon, began now to feel the necessity of providing for their own defence.

It went deep and bitter to Petrarch's sensitive soul to witness the calamities of his ravaged country. His voice was raised, and not ineffectually, to rescue Italy from such barbarous hands.

The Milanese in 1339, and the Florentines in 1348, sent out bands of armed citizens, before whom the foreign marauders yielded ground, without daring to await their encounter; until at last, in 1378, under the patronage of Giovan Galeazzo Visconti, Alberigo di Barbiano gave origin to those companies of Italian men at arms *(compagnie di ventura)* by whom the savage northerners were utterly driven out of the land.

Thus was, only a few years after his death, Petrarch's prophecy fully accomplished, when

he sang, under the influence of a holy inspiration,

> "Virtue 'gainst brutal rage
> Shall rise in arms, and short shall be the test;
> For of the valour of a happier age
> Some sparks still glow within th' Italian breast."

One of Petrarch's most favourite schemes, to which he turned his most strenuous exertions during the whole of his life, on which he laid his best hopes for a prompt cessation of evil in Italy, and which he lived to see accomplished at last, was the reinstalment of the papal see in the metropolis of Christendom.

Rome was then afflicted, as it had always been for several centuries, by the feuds and rivalries of two or three noble houses, the Savelli, Orsini, and Colonna, who, raised to power and wealth by the successive favour of the popes of their respective families, had turned the city and country into a vast field of carnage and devastation.

It was the opinion of Petrarch, as well as of many of the most sober writers and thinkers of that age, that such a state of disorder and anarchy was principally owing to what they called the exile of the christian church in Avignon, and on this persuasion he spared no remonstrance or entreaty to hasten its recall. This was, at the best, a gratuitous assertion,

and rather indifferently sanctioned by previous experience; since Rome and Italy were hardly ever afflicted by any calamity that could not be edmonstrated to have had a pope at the bottom; and since those very factions of Colonna and Orsini were but the natural result of the first examples of papal *Nepotism* given by Nicolas III. and IV.—but it seemed then to be an essential tenet of national creed, that if there was to be a religion in the world, it must have its chief seat in Rome; and if there must be a pope, he must of necessity be an Italian.

Peace be with the memory of Petrarch.

For, if no one can, in our days, doubt the rectitude of his motives, it may be permitted at least to express some regret that a poet should not equally be a prophet, and should not have had sufficient foresight to perceive that he was curing a great evil by another still greater; and that if the Colonna and Orsini could, by some happy turn of vicissitudes, be done away with, —as the ephemeral revolution of Rienzi had nearly succeeded in proving—five centuries of hard-won experience would hardly be sufficient for Italy to rid herself of the popes.

Petrarch's remonstrances, which had fallen unheeded at the foot of the papal throne, during the pontificate of John XXII., of Benedict XII., and Clement VI., were more favourably

listened to by the new pope, Urban V., who was raised to the supreme dignity of the church in 1366. He received the poet's Latin exhortatory epistle with due regard and admiration; and, after having lingered for a few months on his journey, he made his solemn entry into Rome in October 1367, where he soon received the most enthusiastic felicitations of Petrarch, who thus saw his long protracted hopes finally crowned with success.

But no sooner was Urban restored to the august seat of his predecessors, than, plunging as blindly as any of them ever did into the arena of Italian politics, he rallied the Guelphs around his standard, and declared war against the Visconti.

The controversy was soon complicated by the descent of the Emperor Charles IV., who reaped no more honour from this than from his former invasion. Thence ensued one of those long and ruthless wars, of which Italy had to witness but too many at every new generation; at the end of which the pope, scared out of his seat by the brutal but unyielding ferocity of the Visconti, was glad to make his escape back to Avignon, where he soon died of disappointment and weariness.*

Petrarch during this interval, never ceased to shift his residence from Pavia to Padua, and

* A. D. 1370.

from Padua to Venice, either flying before the sudden onset of an unruly soldiery, and the not less dreaded ravages of contagious diseases, or in vain attempts to comply with the wishes of Urban, who invited him to his court in Avignon and Rome.

He had found, in Venice, a home in the house of Francesco da Brossano, a Milanese gentleman, to whom he had married his natural daughter Francesca, born of a clandestine intercourse he had had with an obscure person in Avignon—a star of the second magnitude, it appears, but a fond, affectionate being, who, prodigal to the poet of such earthly bliss as was in her power to bestow, consoled him for all he had to endure from the coldness and inflexibility of Laura. Giovanni, another of his sons issuing from the same union, on whom the poet had lavished his more than paternal cares, after having nearly broken his father's heart by his disorderly demeanour, had been carried off by the pestilence in 1361. Death was thus cutting off all objects on which the poet's affection, in his old age, could rest for support; and his day was lingeringly setting, clouded by bereavement and loneliness at heart, shrinking and withering, void and sick in his bosom. Meanwhile, exhausted by age and infirmities, he felt once more the want of solitude and repose; and

hardly recovering from a severe illness which had suddenly attacked him at Ferrara, sighing as he always did for the free air of the country, he chose his dwelling in the vicinity of Arqua on the Euganean hills, at the distance of twelve miles from Padua.

From this tranquil sojourn he was, however, removed once more on his last mission to the republic of Venice, whither he was sent as an ambassador of his benefactor, Francesco da Carrara, who had already (in 1372) commenced against the queen of the Adriatic that war which he carried on, with short intervals of truce, and with various vicissitudes, until it ended with the total destruction of his whole race in 1406.

Petrarch, however, had the merit of bringing about a suspension of hostilities between the two belligerent powers in 1373. He was well known and revered in Venice, where he had, in 1362, presented the senate with his precious collection of manuscripts. Venice had, two years afterwards, through his mediation, obtained from the Visconti the services of their best general, Luchino dal Verme, under whose guidance the arms of the republic had effected the conquest of Candia.* A lofty seat

* A. D. 1364.

was, on every solemn occasion, reserved to him by the right side of the doge; the republic conferring on him, though nothing in Venice but a private man, the highest honours of the state; and revering in him, as one of his biographers justly observes, "the representative of a higher power,—the supreme chief,—the doge of the republic of letters."

The truce being concluded, he journeyed back to his Euganean solitude, where he was one morning, (July 18, 1374,) found by his attendants dead in his chair, his head leaning on his desk, apparently struck by apoplexy while engaged with one of his books, dying thus the death of a scholar at the advanced age of seventy.

The life of Petrarch and his works do not always perfectly harmonize.

As a writer, Petrarch was not known to have ever disguised truth for any personal danger or interest. A guest and favourite of the Avignonese popes, he uttered the severest reproofs against the vices and infamies of their court. A friend and familiar of the Lombard tyrants, his voice was ever raised for his country, and he dared alone to utter his cry of "Peace, peace, peace!" A creature of the Colonna, he applauded the efforts of Rienzi which ended with the extermination of that family.

Italy, truth, and humanity, were dearer to him than his dearest friends.

But why needed he to be the guest of popes, and minion of tyrants? Why did he continue a familiar with the oppressor, while his heart was bleeding for the oppressed?

Petrarch was a virtuous man, but he was not a hero; his was a candid and generous, but not equally a rigid and steady character. To all his eminent qualities one was wanting, the noblest attribute of man—courage. He gave, in his lifetime, several proofs of that nervous pusillanimity which is but too often inborn in the temperament of men of letters. Of this class of beings Petrarch was the first type. It is now fashionably observed, that men of letters are a kind of middle creatures between man and woman. Petrarch wrote like a man, and acted like a woman. Popes, emperors, and tyrants had for him the regards to which a woman is entitled; and he who, according to his own expressions, feared those whom he loved, was seduced by the arts which generally decide a woman's fate—flattery and caresses.

He was disinterested and frugal; he despised wealth, or lavished it upon his friends, whom he always loved with unexampled fidelity. His poem, "Africa," was dedicated to King Robert when dead: his book, "De Remediis utriusque

Fortunæ," to Azzo da Correggio, when a fugitive and proscribed. He was exempt from ambition, and shunned honours, dignities, and all the cares of public life; but he was not equally inaccessible to vanity, nor to that petty jealousy and spitefulness so highly derogating from a character of true greatness. He mistook public opinion for glory—he purchased the applause of his age at the expense of the censure of all the following.

The honours that awaited him wherever he moved dazzled his judgment; the joy that his appearance roused, the halo that his laurel spread round his head, did not allow him to see objects in their real state; and such was then indeed the state of things, as to render his path exceedingly arduous and perilous. The differences between Guelphs and Ghibelines became more and more complicated. Petrarch was in Rome and Avignon a Guelph; he was a Ghibeline at Milan, Padua, and Parma; as a champion of humanity he was both, as a patriot neither.

Petrarch was not the man of his age.

Had he been born earlier, in the age of Augustus—or later, in the days of Leo X., his life might have been spent in singing the glories of his country, and the blessings of liberty, whilst selling his verses to his liberal Mæcenas.

But the age he lived in was yet an age of struggle and trial. The elements of good and evil were still in conflict, and the fate of the day hung still in suspense. In an age in which the mind was rapidly gaining its ascendency over force, He was the Mind. But he chose to make himself harmless and impotent. He ceased to be feared, as soon as it was known how easily he could be propitiated. His bitterest invectives never gained him an enemy. He was treated as a shrew, whose humour was indulged, and to whom was granted the privilege of scolding by those who knew that he would end by conniving when his fits of displeasure were over—while he, satisfied with his eloquent protestations, lived with the most loathsome despots in such terms of intimacy as if he had actually been a partaker of iniquity.

He lived long enough, as we have said, to be sadly undeceived of all worldly illusions, and his end was embittered by an indefinite dissatisfaction with himself and the world, by a restlessness or repining, a querulousness, bordering on misanthropy and remorse. It seemed as if all the faults of his age were laid to the charge of his conscience, and as if the mission which Heaven imposes upon a superior mind had been by him, through blind condescension, wilfully foregone.

The Latin works of Petrarch have been of late sought with great avidity, as historical documents of his age and character. But as literary productions they are irrevocably exploded. A great name is not sufficient to secure immortality to all works attached to it. Fame sails on a fragile vessel across a stormy sea. Before she reaches the shore, a great part of the cargo has gone overboard.*

The reasons why Petrarch so fondly adhered to the Latin are obvious. The modern dialects did not yet enjoy sufficient credit to gratify his unbounded thirst for fame. Flourishing so many years after Dante, he was not aware of the revolution Dante had operated. What he wrote in Italian, in the love-dreams of his youth, he regarded as a juvenile performance. He was, indeed, induced by universal applause to give them a higher finish in after age; still, as he aimed at the suffrages, not only of Italy, but of the whole world, he wrote accordingly in what was still the language of learning all over the world.

This language he had, by his strenuous exer-

* Petrarch's Latin works—"De remediis utriusque fortunæ"—"Rerum Memorandarum, libri IV."—"Vitæ virorum illustrium."—"De otio religiosarum"—"De Republicâ optime administrandâ."—"Africa"—"Eclogæ," etc., etc. Italian works—"Rime"—"Trionfi." First complete edition of his works, Basle, 1581, fol.

tions, most powerfully contributed to restore to its glory. The reviver and reformer of classicism, he encouraged and directed the researches of all the scholars of Europe. He spared no labour nor expense to bring into light the buried treasures of antiquity. The discoveries, by which Italy undid the work of the middle ages, were conducted under his auspices.

But, by continual dealing with the dead, Petrarch brought himself back to their age. He wrote and lived as a contemporary of Virgil and Cicero. Not satisfied with having rescued their works from oblivion, he reproduced them in his writings, as if anxious to provide by his copies against the chances of a future dispersion of the originals. Happily, in his youth, he had loved, and as Latin is but an awkward language for love-making, he had recourse to the style of the troubadours of Provence and Italy, which was then the language of love.

Petrarch can therefore hardly lay any claim to originality. Before him, Dante, Guitton d'Arezzo, and Cino da Pistoia, had given the love poems of the troubadours a more intellectual and Platonic turn of sentiment. He only excelled his predecessors in his skill in composition, in his gentle and tender ingenuity of pathos, in his sweetness, purity, and elegance of style.

Petrarch sang all his life, without ever fully depicting his love.

His verses do not appear to be the warm immediate expression of overflowing passion, but the result of long meditation and reverie—the reaction of the mind over the tumultuous workings of the heart.

Whatever may be thought of the real nature of his indefinable affection in real life, certain it is that it appears in his poetry no longer as a wasting and preying flame, but as a beacon of immortal light, blazing with a calm beneficent lustre, and pointing to the sky. It is no torrent, dashing from rock to rock, and roaring against all obstacles it meets on its way, but a pure stream on an even land, caressing the flowers that glitter on its banks, and gliding on unhurried and unreluctant.

It is not in his rhymes, therefore, that we must look for the transport or wildness of passion. We shall find there no love, but the reflection of love;—a melancholy, a religion, a mysticism, of which a few fugitive involuntary passages seem scarcely to ruffle the surface.

True, that love is too much deprived of all romance to be long interesting—true, that idol of Laura, and the altar raised in the heart of her lover, look, to us common mortals, as too abstract and indefinite a chimera—true, that

eternal softness degenerates into something like languor and sameness; but, as it has been judiciously observed, "who would accuse the spring of monotony for the multitude of her flowers?" The impression of uniformity arises from our seeing those poems bound together in a large and indiscriminating collection. Each of those sonnets and songs has a little story attached to it, is in itself a little poem, a little romance, independent of all others, which had its own purpose to answer, and its little mission to fulfil. Warm as it sprang from the poet's mind, it was transmitted to the hands of roaming troubadours, and wandered from castle to castle, the delight of knights and ladies, to minister a new phraseology to the dictionary of love which that gallant and chivalrous age was sedulously compiling. Of that phraseology there was but too much in the verses of the poet of Laura; and all those refined, and affected, and false, and puerile images that chill the reader on the very moment of his warmest emotion, are not so much the fault of Petrarch as of that ingenious Provençal school to which he was proud to pertain.

Let us rather admire what exclusively and indisputably belong to him—the loveliness of his language, the melody, luxuriancy, and

spontaneousness of his verses, the flashes of his lyrical fire, the freshness and vividness of his colouring, by which his sonnets and songs preserve, after nearly five centuries, all the fragrance of an opening flower.

The idolatry of the Italians for Petrarch has greatly diminished in the present age. No poet, in ancient or modern times, not even excepting the sovereign Homer himself, can boast of so numberless a crowd of imitators as Petrarch had in the sixteenth and the two following centuries. The rapid degradation of all manly virtues, and the hypocritical colours that corruption assumed in Italy under the influence of priestcraft and jesuitism, can easily account for the ascendency that the sweet Platonic strains of the poet of Laura gained over the darker fancy and the severer style of Dante.

But in our days, when, in their hopes for the rebuilding of their country, the Italians have begun to study the works of their most eminent geniuses in reference to their life and character, when remounting to the source of their evils, they weigh the conduct of those men who had, or could have had, any influence in hastening or in averting them,—the indefinable feeling of mistrust with which they listen to the specious patriotic declamations of the

friend of John XXII., of Charles IV., and of Galeazzo Visconti, has a cooling, disenchanting effect on their enthusiasm, which cannot fail to prove fatal in their estimation of his poetical talents.

To make Petrarch answerable for the effeminacy and corruption of his school in after ages, is, however, a manifest injustice; nor, until we have ascertained how far a bolder and more inflexible line of conduct on his part might have proved successful, are we entitled to lay to his charge his unwillingness to spurn the seduction that artful iniquity laid in his path, or the moderation or the policy of his patrons, who preferred to soothe his indignation by honours and flatteries, rather than deliver up to the sword of the executioner a head hallowed by the laurel.

Such, however, are the ideas of the Italians towards the memory of Petrarch, that they seem wearied with his unshaded prosperity, and they could be thankful to him, had he, like Dante, Machiavello, and Tasso, borne to his tomb the palm of martyrdom rather than his crown of laurel.

Had his right sense of patriotism been so constant and engrossing a passion as his worship of Laura—had the few specimens on chivalrous or national subjects which are to be

read, at wide intervals, throughout his *canzoniere*, been more frequent, the cause of his country would never have found another more eloquent advocate. Those sublime lyrical effusions remain as indicators of his character, as monuments of a mind which the allurements of courtly corruption had not blinded and contaminated, and anxious, as it appears, to clear itself from all charge of participation in the crimes of his age.

Peace be with the memory of Petrarch!

For He alone, by whom his brilliant faculties were so bountifully bestowed, has a right to call him to an account of their employment, and knows how far the man of his choice answered his eternal designs.

CHAPTER III.

BOCCACCIO.

His early life—His amours—Joan of Naples—Affairs of Florence—Uguccione della Faggiuola, Castruccio Castracani—The Duke of Athens—Boccaccio's public life—His conversion—His last years—His classical studies—The Decameron.

On the north-western end of the city of Naples, voluptuously encircling that sleepy bay, there spreads a long verdant ridge, which the early Greek colonists called *Pausilipo*, the end of sorrow; because heaven and earth seem to conspire in securing the inhabitants of that privileged spot against all evils attendant on the rest of their race.

Throughout the bowels of the mountain there opens in the rock a wide gallery, a Roman work, three-quarters of a mile in length which, under the name of "Grotta del Monte Posilipo," remained unmatched among the

most glorious efforts of man until its wonders were superseded by the bolder undertakings of the galleries of Mount Simplon, and by the never-ending work of the Thames Tunnel.

Above the entrance of that tenebrous passage, in a fragrant grove of orange and myrtle, in sight of Naples and her gulf, of Vesuvius and its wide-spreading sides, exhibited to the worship of five hundred thousand souls, there lies an ancient monument, from time immemorial designated by fame as the tomb of Virgil. The tradition among the less cultivated classes in the country is, that this Virgil was an old wizard, whose tomb stands, as it were, as the guard of the grotto, that was dug in one night, at his bidding, by a legion of demons enlisted in his service.

Over that haunted sepulchre there grew a laurel, which some of our grandfathers remember still to have seen, and which might perchance be there still, braving the inclemencies of the north winds, and the lightnings of heaven, had it not been plucked to the very roots by the religious enthusiasm of classical tourists.

Under the shade of that hallowed tree, kneeling on the marble steps of that holy tombstone, there was, five hundred and seven years ago,*

* A.D. 1333.

a handsome youth, of about twenty years of age, with long dark locks falling upon his shoulders, with a bright smiling countenance, a noble forehead, and features after the best antique Florentine cast, with the hues of health and good humour on his cheeks, and the habitual smile of a man whose life-path had hitherto lain amidst purple and roses.

That youth was Giovanni Boccaccio.

Born under unfavourable circumstances, and obliged to atone by a brilliant life for the stain inflicted upon his nativity by the imprudence and levity of his parents, he was long secretly preyed upon by a vague ambition, which in vain he endeavoured to lay asleep among the dissipations of a disorderly youth. There, on the urn of the Latin poet, to which he often resorted in his disgust of everything around him, "he," according to his own account, "felt himself suddenly seized by a sacred inspiration, and entered into a daring vow with himself that his name should not perish with him." So much for the religion of ruins and monuments.

Giovanni Boccaccio was born at Paris in 1313, of a French lady, and a Florentine merchant, named Boccaccio di Chellino, united somewhat after a fashion that was almost legally sanctioned in that town five centuries later, when people were wont to be married "à la face du soleil,

dans un beau jour de printemps, au champ de Mars, devant l'autel de la Patrie." His father was a native of Certaldo, of distinguished descent. He gave the young Giovanni all the advantages of a liberal education at home and abroad, and, as a fond, indulgent parent, with little reluctance suffered him to follow his own juvenile inclination, and trusted him to his good genius.

A few years after that secret compact with glory was entered into, to which we have alluded above, Naples was roused into unusual excitement by the arrival of that great conqueror, who, having waged a successful war against Vandalism, hastened now on his way to the Capitol to receive the triumphal crown adjudged to him by the gratitude of his age—Petrarch.

It was in the favourite haunts of his evening walks at Virgil's tomb that Boccaccio first met his illustrious friend: and though it is not said that that first interview led the two poets to any close intimacy, it did not certainly fail at least to work a deep impression on the susceptible mind of Boccaccio,—and the laurel,—the Capitol, and the shouts of applauding multitudes, started the youth from his slumbers, and rekindled all the ardour of the votary of fame.

From the moment he devoted his whole self to the muses, Boccaccio felt the necessity of

having his Laura. Indeed, being a warm, and, unfortunately, a welcome admirer of the fair sex, he had perhaps as many Lauras as there were beauties in Naples; and giving to women all the leisure he had left from his studies, he followed, for a long while, a brilliant career of wanton success.

At length, however, he gives us to understand, at the age of twenty-eight, on the eve of Easter-day, one fair morning of April, 1341, in the church of St. Laurent in Naples, for the first time and the last, he felt all the power of real love, in sight of that fair creature whose charms he consigned to immortality under the name of Fiammetta.

There is such a striking coincidence, such a combination of circumstances of time and place, in the opening of the amours of Petrarch and Boccaccio, that one might almost feel tempted to set down the whole love romance of the last as a fiction, contrived with a view to resemble as closely as he could the man he had proposed to himself as a model. It is always spring-time, Easter, and a church.

Whether because the Catholic service, by exclusively addressing the senses, allows the mind to go astray, or because the mystical twilight of those old cathedrals, or the soft strains of their angelic music, or the magic

solemnity of those pious ceremonies, may contribute to soften the heart, and offer it unarmed to tender impressions, no one could safely venture to affirm, but this is well known—that in the days of Boccaccio, and I much fear, even in more recent times, in spite of the ease and liberty afforded by theatres, by public balls, and by that arch tempter, the mask; yet the church, (may Heaven forgive such profanation,) the church is the most convenient place in Italy for love intrigues.

However the love of Boccaccio might resemble in its origin the pure flame of his illustrious friend, it soon proved to be of a much more earthly and matter-of-fact nature, and was therefore likely to meet with easier success. The lovely face that seemed to him so irresistible under the dark veil of her passion-week costume, belonged to no other than the Lady Mary, a natural daughter of King Robert of Anjou, then married several years to a Neapolitan lord of high rank.

Soon the *navicella del suo ingegno* set all sails, and the "Filocopo" and "Fiammetta" were composed in the course of a few months, under the impulse of passion, every verse being written in honour of his new flame, and under some disguise or other, speaking of none but her.

But those blissful days of love and poetry were soon interrupted.

Widowed and bereft of all children, Boccaccio di Chellino pined away at Florence in grief and loneliness. His dutiful son, complying with his father's wishes, bade Naples a long adieu,* and spent two dull and obscure years under his paternal roof; when, his father having sought refuge against his chagrin for the loss of his wife in the arms of another, Boccaccio left him to the comforts and sweets of his second honeymoon, and hastened back to Fiammetta.†

The good King Robert of Anjou had died in the meanwhile,‡ and his granddaughter Joan had inherited his throne.

Young, handsome, vain, and inexperienced, the youthful queen suffered herself to be ruled by her gay flatterers, and allowed in her court, and gave herself the first example, of a brilliant as well as unbounded gallantry. At such a court Boccaccio could not fail to be warmly welcome. The Lady Mary (Fiammetta) enjoyed no light favour with her royal sister, and was not unfrequently invited to preside as Queen of Beauty over the tournaments and courts of love, of which Naples was then the

* A.D. 1342. † 1344. ‡ Jan. 1343.

theatre. She appeared at court with the handsome young Florentine by her side, and (the hypocritical denominations of *cicisbeo* and *cavalier servente* being in that rude age happily unknown) she introduced him to the company plainly as her lover.

The grateful poet, so freely admitted to the society of a class of persons that, in the appellation of social convention, were called his betters, soon felt that for a man of his rank nothing remained at court but to act the part of a troubadour; and willing to repay the queen's kindness, he read over to her stories of love and gallantry, to revive the languishing spirits of her brilliant retinue during the monotonous hours of her protracted levees.

Such, according to the version given by most of Boccaccio's biographers, was the first origin of the Decameron.

But storms soon arose against Queen Joan of Naples, and dispersed, in a fright, her merry playfellows.

King Robert, her grandfather, had, for the sake of peace, married her to Andrew, a prince of the Provençal House of Anjou, son of his own eldest brother, and who had, in consequence, better claims to his throne than either himself or his daughter. The rights of the two houses were thus happily blended by this

union; the two cousins and consorts were crowned together, and hopes were reasonably entertained that all subjects of future collision were for ever removed.

Events, however, proved contrary to the wisdom of the provident father.

The old popular prejudices against intermarriage between near relations, and a hundred obscure oracles, (it was then the golden age of demonocracy,) hung ominously on the ill-sorted couple. The two young people had received from nature irreconcilable tempers. Andrew was intemperate and brutal; Joan was elegant and refined, but dangerously addicted to all the arts of feminine coquetry. The coarse manners of the prince, and the arrogance of his Provençal courtiers, soon indisposed the Neapolitan nobility, who thought to confer a great kindness on their queen by ridding her of her husband.

One bright starry night, among the joys of a brilliant soiree, the young prince was strangled in his own apartment, and thrown from the battlements of the palace. Two years later the queen married Louis of Tarento, the well-known instigator of the murder. It is, on a different stage, the whole drama of Darnley and Bothwell.

Louis of Anjou, brother of the murdered

Andrew, had meanwhile been called to the throne of Hungary. At the head of a powerful army he hastened across the Alps to avenge the death of his brother. The states of northern Italy, respecting the justice of his cause, favoured his passage. Joan and her cowardly paramour, not daring to await his arrival, fled to Avignon, imploring the protection of Pope Clement VI., whom the queen won over to her cause by abandoning to him all the rights that the house of Anjou still had on the sovereignty of the Comtat of Avignon. The mighty host of Louis of Hungary was, however, soon swept away by the ruthless pestilence of that ever-memorable year—1348. Louis returned to his states, signing a peace with Joan, who, duly absolved by the pope from all participation in her husband's murder, was restored to her throne in 1351.

Thirty years later, Joan, who had in that interval married three successive husbands, and lived a tranquil, if not a happy life, having in an evil hour interfered in a schism which divided the church on the occurrence of the double election of Clement VII. and Urban VI., was excommunicated and deposed by the latter. Louis of Hungary, who was still cherishing his desire of revenge, charged Charles of Durazzo, his cousin, with the execution of the Pope's

sentence. The queen surrendered to the Hungarian armies, and was, by order of Durazzo, smothered under her pillows after a few months' captivity.

Boccaccio was, however, destined to witness neither Joan's triumphant return, nor her unhappy end. Early in 1350, the tidings of his father's death having reached him, weary of his courtly life, and the tragic scenes that had been perpetrated under his eyes, he quitted Naples, and hastened to enjoy the quiet of a scholar's life in Florence. Since that time no mention is made of the Lady Mary, his beloved, except in one of Boccaccio's sonnets, which gives ground to conjecture that even that chief attraction that chained him to Naples had ceased to exist.

Various and strange had meanwhile been the fortunes of Florence, since that city had been delivered from her fears on the part of Henry VII. of Luxemburg by the timely death of that emperor in 1313.

The Ghibeline party, against which the Florentine republic was constantly struggling in Tuscany, had found the most valiant champions in the two heroes of Pisa and Lucca, Uguccione dalla Faggiuola and Castruccio Castracani.

The first, a daring chieftain, whose success

for a long time equalled his ambition, master of Pisa and Lucca, defeated the Florentines at Monte-Catino in 1314, and would inevitably have led his victorious bands to the conquest of their city, had he not been arrested in his career by simultaneous revolts at Pisa and Lucca, which ended by snatching the sceptre of those two towns from his hands, and paved the road for the usurpations of Castruccio.

Castruccio, who, at the epoch of that insurrection, was held by Uguccione as a prisoner in his castle at Lucca, was by popular enthusiasm placed at the head of that republic. He soon showed himself possessed of more brilliant talents, more daring valour, and proved a more dangerous adversary, than his predecessor had ever been, to Florence. He obtained a signal victory over the armies of that republic, and took possession of Pistoia in 1325. About this time happened the descent of Louis of Bavaria into Italy. Castruccio, whose policy equalled his military valour, joined the emperor on his march to Rome, a skilful adviser no less than a powerful auxiliary; escorted him throughout his march, subjected the emperor's weak mind to his unswerving will, crowned him on the Vatican in 1328, received from him the titles of Roman senator and palatine count, and returned to Tuscany, with the most

sanguine anticipations of uniting all that fair province to his dominions. On his arrival he occupied Volterra and Pisa, besieged and took Pistoia, which had been lost to him during his absence, and turned his arms against Florence. Never had that republic been in more imminent danger, but, as in former extremities, unlooked-for circumstances came to her rescue, and she was released from her terrors by the sudden illness and death of Castruccio, Sept. 1328.

A few years later* Florence was plunged into equal anxieties by the designing ambition of John of Bohemia, who had rallied under his standards the most powerful states of Northern Italy. The absence of the popes, the weakness and long decrepitude of Robert of Anjou, had deprived the Guelphs of their natural chiefs and supporters. Genoa, Bologna, and Parma had been reduced under the rule of their despots, and Florence was soon left nearly alone in her contest. Pisa, her inveterate rival, profited by her distress, defeated her armies in more than one serious encounter, and took possession of Lucca.†

It was in this emergency that the Florentines, who had hitherto tried and adopted more and more democratic forms of government,

* A.D. 1331. † A.D. 1341.

now hoped to provide for their safety by putting themselves under the protection of a tyrant.

Chance had brought to Florence one Gualtier de Brienne, a French nobleman, the heir of one of those fortunate adventurers who had shared, in 1204, the spoils of the Eastern empire,—a lack-land sort of a prince, who was now driven out of his states, but who still preserved his title of Duke of Athens.

A sudden fit of popular excitement raised him to an almost absolute sovereignty in Florence, where he was intrusted with the safety of the state.* Without having sufficient ability to shield the republic from external danger, the duke had cunning enough to turn the power with which he was invested, into the most absolute and arbitrary tyranny. After a whole year of successful usurpation, (it was precisely at the epoch of Boccaccio's first visit to his widowed father,) numerous conspiracies were entered into by every class of citizens, the people arose against him in one mass, and he could only escape from popular exasperation by stealing ignominiously out of Florence, whither he was never to return.†

Thus was Florence still free, and jealous of her freedom, when Boccaccio re-established

* A.D. 1342. † A.D. 1343.

himself in his father's house, in 1350, in his thirty-seventh year, when he was already conspicuous by the fame of his learning.

The year 1350 was, it will be remembered, the epoch of Petrarch's visit to his father's native place, while on his way to the jubilee at Rome. The meeting of the two poets took place nearly before Boccaccio was well settled at home, and the demonstrations of esteem and affection that the laureate bestowed on his friend, tended to increase Boccaccio's popularity among his fellow citizens.

It was an idea universally cherished in that age, that it beseemed a republic to turn all individual eminence of genius to public advantage, and magistrates and ambassadors, not unfrequently even leaders of armies, were chosen from among poets and scholars. The encyclopedic turn which all branches of science seemed then naturally to take, and the veneration and awe with which the illiterate crowd looked up to the votaries of learning, scarcely allowed them any doubt as to their fitness for even the most arduous undertakings, and their deep knowledge of jurisprudence actually gave them the greatest advantage in all political and diplomatic transactions.

Accordingly, no sooner was Boccaccio restored to Florence, than he found himself

charged with the most important missions of the Florentine republic. He was sent to Rimini and Ravenna, to sue for the alliance of those princes against the threatening power of the Visconti; he crossed the Alps again and again, on his way to the court of Louis of Brandeburgh, son of Louis IV. of Bavaria, in 1353; to Avignon in the following year 1354, and once more in 1355; he was at Rome two years later, to congratulate Pope Urban V. on his re-instalment in the metropolis of Christendom.

There were, however, other missions of a humbler, and yet to him dearer nature, which he fulfilled with a more lively satisfaction, and for which he would gladly have given up his more illustrious employments.

There lived still in Ravenna, when Boccaccio was an ambassador at that court—within the shades of a cloister in the convent of Santo Stephano dell' Ulivo—Beatrice, a daughter of Dante, and, if we must judge from her name, his dearest—who had withdrawn herself from the world and its cares, happy to close her eyes in silence by the side of the humble tomb of her father. The Florentines, always anxious to appease the manes of their much injured bard, sent his helpless and destitute daughter a present of ten florins, and charged with their mission Boccaccio, by whom, without doubt,

the idea of that scanty and tardy retribution was originally suggested.

It was likewise at his suggestion that the Florentines revoked the decree of banishment and confiscation pronounced against his friend Petrarch's family, and that he was sent to Milan to reconcile him to his country.

How he failed in his mission has already been said; and we have alluded to the differences that arose between those two illustrious contemporaries on the subject of Petrarch's attachment to the most artful and unprincipled enemies of their common country, the Visconti. But we cannot deny ourselves the pleasure of quoting Boccaccio's own words in a letter to his friend, dated 1354, showing at once the warmth of his patriotism, and the candour and uprightness with which he did not hesitate to upbraid a friend, for whom he entertained more veneration and deference than even love and gratitude.

"I would be silent," he says, "but I cannot. Reverence restrains, but indignation compels me to speak. How could Petrarch so far forget his own dignity, the conversations we held together concerning the state of Italy, his hatred for the archbishop, (John Visconti,) his love for solitude and independence, so far as to imprison himself at the court of Milan? Why

did not Petrarch *obey the dictates of his conscience?* Why did he, who called Visconti a Polyphemus, and a monster of pride, place himself under his yoke? How could Visconti win that which no pontiff, which neither Robert of Naples, nor the emperor himself, could ever obtain?"

To these reproaches there was no answer, and Petrarch was silent. But his kindness and generosity, his vast supremacy of fame, bound Boccaccio to him, and their consonance in literary pursuits easily made up for their discordance in politics.

The Decameron had made its appearance in 1353, and Boccaccio's fame spread far and wide; but this did not go far to improve his fortunes, which, on the contrary, sank lower and lower, partly by the wonted parsimony of republican salaries, partly by inconsiderate expenses occasioned by his literary pursuits, and partly, finally, also, by some indulgence in his dissipated tastes, which his long dealing in philosophy, and the influence of age, had not yet thoroughly amended.

His day of reform and conversion was, however, at hand; and the circumstances leading to that event are so singular, that the whole transaction has the look of one of the hundred tales of the Decameron.

The Decameron had no sooner appeared, than a general uproar of scandal and indignation arose from all the churches and convents of Christendom. Boccaccio's name was uttered coupled with every term of invective and ignominy, so as scarcely to fall short of identifying him with the antichrist.

At length a Carthusian monk from Siena, by name Giovacchino Ciani, moved by more kindly and brotherly feelings, never despairing of the omnipotence of grace, unwilling to abandon any human soul to her doom as long as any breath of hope yet remained, set out on his way to Florence to rescue his prey from the hands of the evil one.

He introduced himself to the poet, a most unusual and unexpected visitor, and asked for a private interview. There, after having exhausted all the topics of monkish eloquence, he informed him how, two nights before, the blessed Pietro Petroni, a monk of his order, for a long course of unblemished life the oracle of the convent, and just dead in odour of sanctity, had, on his deathbed, in his final confession under the seal of sacred secrecy, revealed to him the sentence that awaited Giovanni Boccaccio, if he continued impenitent; how the holy man in his visions of agony had read that doom in the face of our Redeemer,

on whose august forehead all was written, the past, the present, and the future. The monk added, he was charged with similar missions for all the libertines of the age, (rather, we should think, a laborious task,) and that his last visit was reserved for Petrarch. At length, bending on the ear of his astonished listener, and lowering his voice to a whisper, the charitable monitor revealed to him some of the most important events of his life, of which Boccaccio believed himself the only depositary.

Left to his own reflections, the author of the Decameron, who had, in so many passages of his work, described the tricks and cheats of such cowled prophets and miracle-mongers, and admirably caricatured the very language employed by his ghostly adviser, now, by that air of unction and candour, was completely thrown off his guard, and gave himself up for undone. Then, in a fit of terror, preparing for his imminent fate, and resolving to repair to the same convent whence the awful warning had come, he burnt as many of his licentious works as were still under his control, and wrote his adieu to Petrarch, informing him of his new vocation. The calm admonitions of his friend partly revoked that hasty resolution. He persisted, however, in putting on the church robes, and his life was, to its end, sage and exemplary.

The state of the poet's private finances was most amply calculated to aid his plans of penitence and reform. During the last period of his wandering life, Boccaccio was more or less afflicted with poverty.

He flattered himself to have found a liberal patron in the seneschal Acciaiuoli, a Florentine prince, residing in Naples, but was soon to be undeceived.

This nobleman, who had been a friend and counsellor of Louis of Tarento, Joan's second husband, and who had followed the two fugitive princes with constancy and fidelity in the hour of adversity, was, at their restoration, rewarded with unlimited favour and confidence. He was one of Petrarch's thousand and one friends and correspondents, and, like many other noblemen of that age, gave himself all the airs of a liberal patron of learning. Extreme want, and a vague desire, perhaps, of revisiting a place endeared to him by so many juvenile associations, in an evil hour induced Boccaccio to accept the seneschal's magnificent invitations, and to repair to his palace in Naples, charged with the functions of biographer and historiographer of the great man.* He was sent up to a squalid room in the garrets, and directed to take his place at table with footmen and stable-boys.

* A.D. 1360.

Republican as he was, Boccaccio had no such notions of equality.

He ran off from the proud mansion, and took refuge in the house of Mainardo Cavalcanti, one of his Florentine friends residing in Naples. Hence he crossed over to Venice, to throw himself into the arms of Petrarch; hence again he returned to Florence, and soon after repaired to his father's native village, Certaldo, his age and his literary pursuits having unfitted him for the tumults of the popular factions with which Florence was then agitated. A few political missions and friendly excursions hardly ever diverted his attention, for a long time, from his dearest literary employments, and it never was without regret he left, never without transport he revisited, the solitude of his paternal dwelling.

He felt as if he had found his final resting-place, and as if nothing remained for him but to smooth his pillow, and lay him down and rest.

The tidings of Petrarch's death, which he received late in 1374, seemed to warn him that his own hour had struck. He withdrew from Florence, where he had been called to read and expound the Divine Comedy, and died at home in Certaldo, in December, 1375, aged sixty-three.

Such was the end of Giovanni Boccaccio; in his youth an epicure, a courtier, a libertine; in his age a scholar, a citizen, a devotee; but all over his life an upright, noble character, warm, loyal, modest, inaccessible to jealousy or simulation, though easily driven after the first impulses of a passionate nature, nor always insensible to the seductions, the follies, the superstitions of that unsettled state of society, of which he was to leave in his works such a faithful representation.

As a restorer of classical literature, Boccaccio has hardly less claims to the gratitude of modern ages than his friend Petrarch, notwithstanding the more extensive influence and greater means this last could employ in his researches.

What Petrarch had done for the restoration of Latin, Boccaccio performed for the restitution of Greek.

The labour and expense these two noble champions, and likewise their allies, followers, and successors, had to undergo in transcribing and purchasing, the obstacles they had to overcome in collecting and arranging the ancient manuscripts, for which we are wholly indebted to them, can only be conceived by such as have a distinct idea of the prevailing ignorance of that age.

We have all heard of that absurd traveller, who ran back in horror and disgust from an inland town in the western states of North America, because he found it impossible to procure any *Macassar oil* in the place, being thereby made aware that he had outstepped the limits of the civilized world. But we can hardly imagine what must have been the feelings of Petrarch, when we read in his letters, that travelling in his youth through Flanders, and happening to discover in Liege an old copy of Cicero's de Officiis, in the total impossibility of finding any man in that then populous and thriving town capable of transcribing a Latin manuscript, he set about it himself, and it was with the greatest difficulty that he could obtain *any liquid* in some manner answering the purpose of *ink*.

What more? In Italy itself, and in one of the most advanced and polished of all Italian towns, in Venice, the library which had cost Petrarch so many years of study and care, and which he had offered as a present to the republic, with a fond hope to secure it against all chances of war with which every town on the continent was incessantly menaced, in Venice itself, through no other accident than stupid neglect, not one volume of that collection has been preserved; not even the slightest docu-

ment recording how that invaluable treasure was lost to posterity.

The fame that the monastery of Monte Cassino had long time enjoyed, as the sanctuary of literature, induced Boccaccio to visit its library during a short excursion he made through those provinces. He was shown to a large granary without skylight or windows, to which he could only have access by the aid of a ladder; there, piled up in a shapeless mass, lay, plunged in a spell-bound silence, those sages of antiquity who had so long a tale to unfold to the past. Neither the monks nor their visitors ever frequented that lurid hall, nor did they ever resort to those books, but when through want of papyrus they were compelled to erase the dialogues of Plato for the dissertations of one of their doctors, or the Metamorphoses of Ovid for the legends of one of their saints.

Manuscripts came thus into the hands of the amateur without beginning or end, without title-page or index, with an obsolete or absurd orthography, and with a hundred different conventional abbreviations. This accounts for the numberless and apparently aimless journeys those earliest discoverers were constantly engaged in, in their advanced age—regardless of the inclemency of the seasons and the insecurity of the roads. This also accounts for their

pecuniary embarrassments, their extensive correspondence, and the many agents they employed, absorbing the more money in proportion as intelligence was, in that age of brute force, comparatively scarce. Thus we read of Petrarch that he kept four secretaries constantly at work; of Boccaccio, that he copied with his own hand Livy, Tacitus, Terence, Boethius, a great part of Cicero, and Varro. Homer and Dante he transcribed more than twice, and, these not so much for his own use as with an object to present his friends with them; or, in moments of distress, with the purpose to offer them for sale. No less perseverance and disinterestedness were required to rescue the ancient world from the deep layers of barbarism under which it was buried; the cells of the convents, the cellars and prisons, the darkest corners of the earth, were digged and searched, and ancient literature arose, as it were, like Pompeii and Herculaneum, from the bowels of the earth.

For all that the moderns know of ancient Greek, they are indebted to Boccaccio. Dante, in his own age one of the most widely informed scholars, never, perhaps, had regularly studied that language. Petrarch says of himself, in his letter of thanks to Boccaccio for the Iliad with which he had presented him, that he de-

lighted in the sound of Homer's verses, though he was unable to understand them.

The first school of Greek in modern Europe was opened under the auspices of Boccaccio.

Petrarch had met in Padua, and been somewhat familiar with Leontius Pilatus, one of the many Greek grammarians who sought refuge in Italy from the tumults that were hastening the final subversion of the eastern empire. Leontius was a Calabrian by birth, but by choice a Greek; he was full of that false patriotic egotism, so natural in all countries that have reached a high degree of culture and prosperity, and which consisted in a sovereign contempt for all that was not Greek. He was cross, vain, and arrogant—a bear in a scholar's garb. Petrarch, the refined and courtier-like Petrarch, could never manage, nor, even for the sake of his Greek, endure him. But Boccaccio's greater knowledge of human nature, amenity of manners, and versatility of genius, forced a smile even on the lips of the grizzly grammarian, who was induced to follow him to Florence. There Boccaccio entertained him hospitably in his own house for three years, obtained from the senate a decree for the erection of a Greek school, made himself his first pupil, and succeeded in perfectly mastering the difficulties of that noblest of languages. He

undertook, with his aid, a translation of Homer into Latin, and, by his example and activity, spread over all Italy a novel taste for the Greek classics.

From his first attempts must be dated that important diversion that Greek scholars, during that and the following century, operated in Italian literature, especially under the patronage of Cosmo, and of his grandson, Lorenzo de Medici.

Of his Latin works, of which the style is by the critics considered far inferior to that of Petrarch, we deem it beyond our office to discourse; and as we only take into consideration the works that still keep an eminent rank in Italian literature, we shall pass in silence the Teseide, Filocopo and Fiammetta, the Life and Commentaries on Dante, studying Boccaccio merely as the author of the Decameron.*

The Decameron, or the Ten Days, is a collection of one hundred of those novels and tales

* Boccaccio's Latin works: "De Genealogia Deorum"—"De montium sylvarum, lacuum, fluviorum, stagnorum et marium nominibus"—"De casibus virorum et fœminarum illustrium"—"De claris mulieribus"—"Eclogæ." Italian works: "La Teseide"—"L' amorosa visione"—"Il Filostrato"—"Il Ninfale Fiesolano"—"Il Filocopo"—"L' amorosa Fiammetta"—"L' Urbano"—"L' Ameto"—"Il Corbaccio"—"Vita di Dante"—"Commentario a la Commedia di Dante"—"Il Decameron." First edition of the "Decameron," 1470. Best edition by Giunti, in Florence, 1527.

which Boccaccio is believed to have read at the court of Queen Joan of Naples, and which, later in life, were by him assorted together by a most simple and ingenious contrivance.

The merit of the original invention of Boccaccio's plan has been often made a subject of contest, but we think with little foundation. The subject, too, of several of his tales has been traced to some far-fetched origin, but very little to the detriment of his glory. The Decameron has remained for many centuries the best model for the story-tellers of all countries; whilst the legends and ballads, from which he might be presumed to have drawn, are more than half buried in oblivion.

The scaffoldings by which the great fabric was propped up during its erection, have been removed, and it now stands alone and secure, as if it were the work of enchantment.

It is a well-known fact that Boccaccio did not witness the dread mortality of 1348 in Florence; and the appalling description he made of it in the introduction to his tales, must have been drawn from a bold association of ideas, by referring to his reminiscences of his native place, the miserable spectacle he beheld with his own eyes again and again in Naples, in Padua, in every town and province of Italy.

From Thucydides to Botta, Manzoni, and

Bulwer, there has been no lack of descriptions of pestilence.

Both romancers and historiographers seemed always well aware of the great results that would be derived to their narrative, from the exhibition of a whole race struck by that most direful of scourges. Yet Boccaccio's stands unrivalled for truth and evidence; and the happy idea of choosing, by way of contrast, so gloomy an *overture* to effusions of so gay a nature, has been too often, we think, and too lightly, set down as an extravagant aberration from the rules of taste. The sufferings so keenly described in the proem are intended to throw light upon the more brilliant pictures of the enchanting country in the neighbourhood of Florence. The ten gay recluses who, desirous of withdrawing themselves from the public calamity, have repaired to the genial shades of their country-seats, there endeavouring to abstract themselves from their terrors, in the enjoyment of every luxury, and in the pleasurable entertainments of a sympathetic society, seem constantly to be haunted by the phantoms of the scourge they have left behind; and among their flowery walks, their songs, their carols and feasts, the warbling of the birds, the murmur of the springs, those gallant story-tellers, and not less the fancy of their readers, seem con-

stantly distracted by the groans of the dying, and the funeral knell of the desolate city.

It must be equally said to the praise of Boccaccio, that he succeeded in bestowing something like order and unity upon so vast a conception. Boccaccio gave us in one volume the virtues and vices of the human family, the whole world in a stage. There we have dupes and rogues, misers and libertines, ladies, knights, Jews and pagans; pilgrims, saints, angels, pirates and robbers; kings, popes, cardinals and monks—monks above all, white and grey, and blue monks—monks without end.

No writer in Italy, and few out of Italy, ever more deeply understood, or more forcibly depicted the human heart than Boccaccio; none more possessed with that *vis comica* which has power to compel mankind to laugh at their own foibles, and to make them wiser at their own expense. The best parts of Boccaccio's tales have an eminently moral aim, and must, in his own times, have had a salutary effect, in so far as they boldly unmasked all kind of hypocrisy, and stripped vice of its alluring disguises. True virtue and magnanimity never fail to find a warm advocate and panegyrist in Boccaccio, and some of his heroic tales sufficiently show how deeply rooted were yet in Italy the loftiest chivalrous feelings.

Only, in his eagerness to be true to his model, he represented society in its most shocking nudity; and in his fondness for jesting he never refrained from the coarsest jokes, or from the most obscene allusions, which are happily, in our day, too disgusting to be any longer very dangerous. The hearty laugh of Queen Joan, and the provoking blush of his princess, the universal applause of a gross and idiotic age, encouraged Boccaccio to continue in a style which he had occasion to regret, as we have seen, during the rest of his life.

While, however, we praise the conduct of

"La mère qui en defend la lecture à la fille,"

we cannot help pitying the efforts of those who hope to purify the Decameron of all improprieties, by mutilating or paraphrasing its tales, or endeavouring to explain its double-entendres by silly allegories. In order to make an honest book of Boccaccio, you must do like that learned Florentine dyer, who, having been challenged to *blot out* all faults of a poem he had been heard to censure, answered by plunging the book into a cauldron of black.

But the merits that Boccaccio's writings have always had in the eyes of his countrymen, chiefly consisted in the purity and elegance, the richness and roundness, the fluency of

language. The Decameron completed the work of the poem of Dante and Petrarch's *canzoniere*; and yet his classical studies, his veneration, we would say, his idolatry for Latin, have contributed to give the Italian language a specious, artificial turn, a vague, unnatural construction, a verbosity, an intricacy, that render it, in prose at least, for a modern language, exceedingly affected and unwieldy.

The wonderful precision and energy of Dante was diluted and vitiated in the round periods of Boccaccio; so that notwithstanding the more manly diction of Machiavello and Alfieri, Italian prose has scarcely yet, after five centuries, been set upon any regular standard. The devotion of a great many Italians for their first master of prose has, however, considerably subsided; and it is not difficult to find, out of Florence, persons willing to admit, that "if Boccaccio's *language* is peradventure the best, his *style* is altogether the worst."

But if his credit among the philologues is perhaps on its wane, his value as an inventor, as an adept in the magic of the human heart, as a fertile, various, lively narrator, has in Italy and elsewhere reached its zenith; and, in the ever-floating balance of the opinions of men, his name, as a genius endowed with powerful faculties, stands far above that of his more for-

tunate and illustrious contemporary, Petrarch, as his character for firmness and frankness, for unassuming modesty and unswerving integrity, is above every shadow of blemish.

Death is a slow but sure and impartial dispenser of justice to generous spirits. The pomps of a court, and the applause of a bedazzled multitude, fade and die off within the silence of the grave. Truth alone remains, like one of the funeral lamps, preserving a spark of life in the darkness of ages, when time has swept off even the dust of the tomb.

The world has now come to a conclusion, which would have been resented by Boccaccio as an insult during life,—which seems as if it would grieve him, even in his place of eternal rest,—that he was endowed with a greater mind and a nobler heart than his friend.

CHAPTER IV.

DECLINE AND FALL OF ITALIAN LIBERTY.

Italian Condottieri—Success of their arms at home and abroad —Their pernicious influence on the destinies of the country —Francesco Sforza—Carmagnola—Ladislaus of Naples—Origin of the Medici—Conspiracies at Milan—at Florence—at Rome—State of Italy towards the end of the Fifteenth Century—of Europe—Foreign Invasions—Charles VIII.—Louis XII.—League of Cambray—Holy League—Wars of Francis I. and Charles V.—Effects of the foreign invasions on the national character—A view of the surviving states—Venice—Genoa—Andrea Doria—Last downfal of Florence—Savonarola—Machiavello—Francesco Ferruccio—Crowning of Charles V.—Conclusion.

THE enjoyment of independence and freedom could only be continued in Italy by the same instrument with which it was originally secured —superiority in arms. As long as the population of the Lombard towns could be mustered in steady battalions before their walls, or ranged behind their bulwarks to the direction

of their engines of war, the hosts of their ancient rulers, the German emperors, had no chance of establishing a firm footing in the country. They ventured sometimes across the Alps; they swept adown the open plain with awe and mistrust; they conciliated the good-will of those restless republicans by flattering their factious propensities; they crowned their Cæsar on the Capitol with little pomp or ceremony, and hastened back to their home in the North, glad to have so cheaply escaped from a fated land, which had been the tomb of myriads of their predecessors.

But those warlike virtues, which were no longer put in requisition to repel the attacks of foreign invaders, were turned to the gratification of unnatural ambition, were made subservient to the mean spirit of municipal jealousies, were exhausted in the atrocities of brotherly feuds.

Milan, Venice, and Florence, the most conspicuous and powerful cities, conspired against the liberties of such of their neighbours as had, by their co-operation and alliance, been most efficient to bring about the triumph of their national cause. Como, Crema, Tortona, Brescia, Verona, and a great number of others whose names sounded so glorious for deeds of heroism during the wars of the Lombard league,

had long since disappeared from the list of free towns. Finally, in 1406, Florence consummated her long-premeditated fratricide by the extinction of Pisa.

No sooner had the final doom of any of the conquered republics been sealed, than all public spirit and energy, industry and commercial prosperity, were at an end. The generous and active, who had not perished in the defence of their municipal independence, removed to new scenes of action, or emigrated to foreign countries, preferring the evanescent hopes, the vain regrets, the misery and loneliness of exile, to the spectacle of the degradation and thraldom of their native city. The lowest classes plunged into utter dejection and apathy, and remained neutral spectators, if they did not actually exult at the dangers that threatened their conquerors. The power of Milan and Florence thus essentially diminished in the same measure as those cities strove to increase the extent of their territory.

But when the disorders of tumultuous democracy paved the way for the rise of domestic despotism,—when every town, especially of Lombardy, had fallen a victim to the valour or to the cunning and perfidy of a daring chieftain, the enthralled population were either easily induced by weariness and despondency, or

forcibly compelled, to lay down their arms. The defence of the state was trusted to the care of him who had alone an interest in its preservation, and the Italians were trained up to that school of absolute passiveness which alone can befit a generation of slaves.

The earliest tyrants upon whom the protection of the states they had unlawfully seized upon, thus naturally devolved, were indeed generally equal to their task. Whatever might be the vices and crimes with which their memory is contaminated, the military talents of such men as Mastino, and Cane della Scala, of Matteo and Bernabò Visconti, of Francesco da Carrara and Castruccio Castracani, cannot be called in question. In all the endless contests in which their mutual suspicions and jealousies constantly engaged them, they were always seen at the head of their soldiery, exciting their warlike enthusiasm by striking examples of personal prowess.

The usurpers of republican freedom seemed to have, for a long period of years, inherited and concentrated upon themselves all the splendour of republican bravery.

But the leaders were almost the only Italians that fought in their armies.

The warriors they led into the field were not natives of the country in whose defence, or for whose possession they were made to lavish their

blood. Their ranks were filled up by those swarms of northern mercenaries whom want of fame, or curiosity, or not unfrequently hunger and poverty, led into Italy in quest of adventure. To these half-savage hirelings the Lombard princes, who could not, or would not, rely on the support of their reluctant and murmuring subjects, entrusted their personal safety, no less than the furtherance of their ambitious schemes. The terror struck among the inhabitants of Italy by the fierce aspect and habits, and by the bloody executions of those ferocious Northerners, had no little effect to deter them from those martial pursuits for which their comparative mildness and civility seemed to unfit them. The progress of trade and agriculture, and the wealth attendant upon their cultivators, invited the laborious Tuscans and Lombards to more peaceful avocations; and war, which had hitherto been the freeman's duty, became the soldier's trade, and was given up to those French and German cutthroats, who seemed to be born for no other more honest or humane calling.

But the Italian princes, as well as their subjects, had soon occasion to repent the haste with which they had laid down their sword, and abandoned themselves to the mercy of lawless robbers.

For a few years the whole unarmed country became a prey to their ravaging fury. After having offered their services to the highest bidder, and fought for any state that could afford to hire them and their horses, finding themselves at large after the restoration of peace, they carried on the war on their own account, and declared themselves the enemies of all the world. Had there ever been among so many elements of material strength only one superior leading genius to give their depredations union of design, Italy might perhaps have bowed before them, and its independence have met with a premature fate. But, as it was, their career was only a work of destruction. Werner, Lando, Hawkwood, and Walter of Montreal, notwithstanding the romantic interest excited of late in favour of some of them, were nothing but brutal freebooters, distinguished among their French, English, or German followers, by no other quality than a stronger frame, a fiercer countenance, and a heavy-dealing hand.

The day of foreign bondage had not yet come for Italy.

As soon as they perceived how the mercenary swords of their foreign auxiliaries could be turned against their bosoms, the Lombard princes made aware of their improvidence,

called their subjects to arms; Florence mustered her bands of undisciplined and yet undaunted burghers; all Italy arose sword in hand, and for another century she ruled uncontrolled over the battle-field.

It has already been said, that from the day in which the appeal of Petrarch had power to induce the Italians to free their country from those bands of foreign marauders, a company of Italian men-at-arms was formed by the order of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, commanded by Alberigo di Barbiano, in 1378, which, under the name of Company of St. George, soon proved formidable to the French and German leaders, under whom Alberigo himself and the greatest part of his followers had made their apprenticeship.

The school of Barbiano gave Italy that long succession of celebrated condottieri, who, down to the descent of Charles VIII., raised the art of war to its highest standard, and gave the Italians a wide ascendency over their foreign competitors. Towards the beginning of the fifteenth century, Braccio da Montone and Sforza Attendolo, the inventors of different systems of military tactics, enrolled in their ranks the most generous Italian youths, and the *Bracceschi* and *Sforzeschi* schools constituted two emulous military factions, and dis-

puted against each other the palm of superior valour and skill in a hundred encounters.

By falling into the hands of the Italians, the art of war seemed to have laid aside, in a great measure, its horrors, and participated of the gentleness and refinement for which a more advanced civilization gave that nation, in the Middle Ages, so great a superiority over their ultra-montane neighbours.

The perfection to which the Milanese armourers had brought their manufacture of defensive weapons, had gone far to secure the absolute invulnerableness of man and horse. Valour, directed by foresight and intelligence, gave rise to that complicated order of manœuvres and stratagems which the ancients so well knew how to turn to advantage, but which was looked upon with contempt by the headlong impetuosity of feudal chivalry. The Italians first taught how the greatest results could be obtained with the least possible effusion of blood. These gallant adventurers, mostly issuing from the same school, generally enlisted in a cause to which they were perfect strangers, substituted love of fame and generous emulation for the thirst of prey, or for the rabid inveteracy of party spirit. Feelings of chivalrous courtesy and forbearance, indivisible from genuine bravery, soon prevailed among

men who were actuated by no personal rancour. The maxim, "Uomo in terra non fa più guerra," (never strike on a fallen foe,) is characteristically national. The custom of setting prisoners of war unransomed at liberty, soon after the first heat of conflict, arose from a natural impulse of the Italian soldiery, which their leaders in vain would have attempted to resist.

A battle in Italy was little more than a tournament. The conqueror and the vanquished parted with nearly balanced losses, soon to meet again on another field, and under different standards.

Perhaps this system of mutual mercy and indulgence was carried to extravagance; and when we read in Machiavello, (who, however, in this case is by no means to be relied upon,) of some engagements, such as those of Anghiari and Castracaro, in which, after the action of a whole morning, only two or three men were lost, and those only in consequence of the heat of the day and the weight of armour—we may feel tempted to laugh. But as long as that kind of warfare was sufficient to protect the country from all foreign aggression, and had power to spare the trembling multitude the spectacle of useless carnage; as long as those kind-hearted champions were dreaded and

revered abroad, and their services requested by the most liberal offers,—as it happened in France and Burgundy, during what was called the "war of the public weal," where the Italians measured their forces against the adventurers of every nation,—we have hardly reason to quarrel with them, if, by allowing their enemies to escape unhurt, they enhanced the importance of their services, and prolonged the duration of the campaign to secure the continuation of their appointments.

It was only after a period of one hundred and twenty years, at the epoch of the descent of Charles VIII. in 1494, that the Italians found themselves once more in front of foreign armies; and then the relentless cruelty with which the French cavalry slew their prostrate enemies in cold blood, and the many instances in which a surrendering garrison was put to the sword against all the rights of nations, struck a new panic among the descendants of Braccio and Sforza, who could not see the reason of that wanton barbarity.

The whole discipline of an army had also, by that time, undergone a complete revolution. The battalions of Swiss infantry had learned in their Burgundian wars to withstand the charge of the best cavalry of Europe. The use of field artillery, also a new and quite anti-

Italian invention, which destroyed whole ranks at one stroke, and doomed to the same fate the bravest as well as the meanest combatant, had a demoralising effect upon the southern soldiery, among whom every man-at-arms was accustomed to rely rather on his individual powers than on the combined efforts of masses.

But we anticipate events.

Before those companies of Italian militia were driven by foreigners from the field which they occupied during the whole course of the fifteenth century, they had been one of the most efficient instruments to undermine the spirit of Italian nationality.

The difficulty of training men and horses to the complicated manœuvres of the heavy-armed cavalry, widened the distance between soldiers and citizens. Those were Italians, but by no means national troops. They owed their origin and their support to a tyrant, and found their interest in ministering to his ambition. As is but too often the case, even in more enlightened ages, the soldiers hated and despised the people from which they were chosen; they were apt to consider the public property as their own appanage; they trod upon their native land as on the prize of conquest; they laid the country which they had sworn to protect, under a summary execution, whenever their

employers were either slow or reluctant to fulfil their engagements. On their part, they were not always scrupulous in maintaining their promises; they evinced a very indifferent fidelity to their employer, and oftentimes divided his states between them. Jacopo del Verme, Facino Cane, Pandolfo Malatesta, Ottobon Terzo, and other captains of adventure, to whose guardianship Gian Galeazzo Visconti had committed the minority of his two sons, Gian Maria and Filippo Maria, took advantage of the disorder and anarchy into which the state had fallen, and seized upon the cities of that large duchy, to the spoliation of its legitimate heirs.*

Forty-four years later, Francesco Sforza, son of Sforza Attendolo,—of an adventurous leader, who, by changing his woodman's hatchet into a trooper's battle-axe, had raised himself to the rank of the greatest condottieri,—obtained the hand of Bianca, the illegitimate daughter of Filippo Maria, the last Visconti, and was by him raised to the sovereignty of Cremona. After the death of the duke, who left no legitimate heir, (for the imperial bull which had invested Gian Galeazzo with the duchy of Milan, in 1395, expressly excluded women from the succession,) the ambitious Sforza resolved to

* A. D. 1403.

make good by the strength of arms a title to which his marriage gave him no claims. He offered his services to the Milanese, who, after the demise of their last duke, had reconstituted their ancient republic, and allying himself with the Venetians, their enemies, led his victorious armies against the Lombard capital, and after a short siege, was, by its half famished inhabitants, acknowledged as their absolute master.

These examples soon proved contagious among the unprincipled soldiery by which the country was overrun. It seemed as if the good old times of chivalry had been revived, when the meanest page had only to set out on a fine morning, and let the reins loose on the neck of his courser, sure that the faithful instinct of that sagacious animal would carry his rider to the land of peril and adventure, where he could, at his choice, aspire to the coronet of a lord, or the hand of a princess.

To the thirst of gold, and the enjoyment of sensual pleasure, which seemed alone to animate the bands of foreign plunderers in the preceding century, the Italian condottieri substituted the wary designs of a loftier ambition.

Braccio da Montone, Niccolò Piccinino, Bartolomeo Coleoni, and many others, established each of them their dominion in some of the towns of Romagna. The cities of that pro-

vince, from which the best combatants were especially recruited, underwent a complete military organization, and were almost daily forced to acknowledge new despots. Venice and Florence alone knew how to associate those leaders in the defence of their territories, without ever allowing them to interfere with their governments, or to march their troops into their capitals. It was only a century later that Florence was at length compelled, in her last extremities, to depart from this line of policy; and the final overthrow of her free state was the consequence of the trust she put in the support of a soldier of fortune, Malatesta Baglioni.

Venice, owing to her impregnable site, or, perhaps to the arts of that dark suspicious policy by which she watched over the generals she held in her pay, never met with a similar fate. She defeated all their ambitious schemes by adroit counterplots; she knew, at the slightest intimation of defection or treason, how to rid herself, by fair means or foul, of her dangerous defenders.

Francesco Carmagnola—a Piedmontese, who had also risen from a peasant to the rank of one of the best generals of his age; who had by turns established and shaken the throne of Filippo Maria Visconti, and who, out of resentment against his former employer, had entered

into the service of his enemies, the Venetians, —having awakened the sleepless mistrust of that jealous aristocracy, was allured to Venice by every demonstration of honour and friendship; and there, having unwarily suffered himself to be separated from his guards, was surprised, arrested, and beheaded in the square of San Marco, with all that silence and hurry, with all that awful mystery, which long since involved all the proceedings of the Venetian oligarchy.*

Meanwhile, the Italians, as a nation, had long since ceased to offer any resistance to the usurpations of power. They had learned blindly to recognise the right of the strongest; they had felt that their efforts could have no better result than a change of masters; and resigned themselves to abide by the decrees of fortune, and bear the yoke of any man whom the chances of combat had given power to impose it.

In Florence alone, force was not yet a supreme, uncontrollable arbiter.

The wealth and prosperity of that commercial republic enabled it to oppose the resources of inexhaustible treasures against the incessant efforts of the tyrants of Lombardy.

It was a war of gold against iron.

The best lances of the Italian free companies

* A. D. 1432.

were ever at the service of the Florentine merchants. The adroit management of their diplomatists never failed to enlist in the cause of their republic the remotest auxiliaries. Fortuitous circumstances, such as sudden deaths, famine, and pestilence, seemed to conspire to the protection of Florence.

Gian Galeazzo Visconti, who, since the year 1390, having added to his ample possessions of Lombardy, Genoa, Perugia, Siena, Lucca, and Pisa, encompassed all round the Florentine territory, was suddenly struck by the hand of Providence on the very eve of removing the last obstacle to his sovereignty of Italy by the subjugation of Florence.*

Ladislaus, king of Naples, son of that Charles of Durazzo who had deprived Queen Joan of her crown and life, having, by an unblushing violation of all faith and principle, cleared his way to the throne, and prevailed over the princes of the rival branches of Anjou, was seized by a vain ambition of extending his dominion beyond the confines of his kingdom. He took advantage of the state of anarchy into which the States of the Church had been thrown since more than half a century, by the dissensions of the great western schism, subdued Rome, Perugia, the March and the Duchy

* A. D. 1402.

of Spoletto, and advanced towards the centre of Tuscany. A long series of campaigns ensued, in which the great masters of the Sforzeschi and Bracceschi schools had frequent opportunities of measuring their forces. The Florentines would, however, according to all probabilities, have succumbed in that unequal contest, had not a sudden illness again come to their rescue, and forced Ladislaus back to his states, where he only arrived in time to expire in his capital.*

War continued to rage at Naples with redoubled vigour during the reign of Ladislaus' sister, Joan II., a weak and profligate woman, who, obeying the influence of worthless minions, gave, by her frequent adoptions, rise to the pretensions of several competitors, and plunged her kingdom into numberless factions, from which it never recovered until Alphonso the Magnanimous, king of Arragon and Sicily, after long disastrous vicissitudes, made good his own rights against his opponents, and revived in the two Sicilies the happy times of Frederic II.†

Gian Maria Visconti, and Filippo Maria, his brother, cowardly, but crafty and ambitious despots, proved no less dangerous enemies to Florence than Gian Galeazzo, their father, had been before them. But the sudden assassina-

* A. D. 1414. † A. D. 1442.

tion of Gian Maria, their alliance with the Venetians, and the opportune defection of Carmagnola, operated in favour of the Florentines; and after the extinction of the Visconti in 1447, their successors, the Sforza, never felt sufficiently strong on their throne to meddle with the affairs of Tuscany, so that this province was freed from all molestation on the part of external powers, until the evil destinies of Italy started up new enemies from the other side of the Alps.

Meanwhile, there flourished at Florence a family, who, arising from utter obscurity, had acquired immense riches by engaging in deep commercial speculations, and lavished that wealth in the promotion of public welfare, to make it an instrument of political ascendency.

Cosmo, the third representative of the family of Medici, in his youth the wealthiest merchant in Europe, a lover of literature, and a friend and patron of its cultivators; a liberal, hospitable, affable man, affecting popular feelings and habits, and courting the public favour by unbounded liberalities, rallied around him the numerous malcontents, and set up a strong opposition against the burgher aristocracy, which, especially under the guidance of Rinaldo degli Albizzi, monopolized the sovereignty of the republic.

The headlong impetuosity of his competitors, and the unjust sentence of banishment that was pronounced against him, centered all the popular predilections upon his head, and, at his return, he found himself the idol of the multitude, the sole arbiter of the popular voice.

Cosmo died in 1464, and the flattering, but in that age rather common, inscription of "Pater patriæ," was engraven upon his tomb.

Piero, his son, who succeeded to his wealth, did not equally inherit his talents or his popularity. But the party that had been for thirty-four years attached to his father's fortunes, did not desert him, and he was enabled to transmit, at his death in 1469, the lustre of his family undiminished to his children, Lorenzo and Giuliano. Thus had lassitude, from long political turmoils, the influence of the irresistible ascendency of wealth, and the display of liberal accomplishments, carried into effect what violence might, peradventure, never have been able to accomplish—the subjection of Florence. The jealous watchfulness of those turbulent republicans was gradually lulled to sleep by the blandishments of an obsequious *parvenu*, by the blessings of uninterrupted tranquillity, and the consequent progress of trade and industry, and by the splendour of a revival of literature.

The people of Lombardy were, therefore, forcibly resigned, those of Tuscany willingly conciliated, to the loss of civil freedom: terror or gratitude had equally established order and silence among the lowest classes; but there lived still in Milan, as well as in Florence, a great number of ardent minds, who could not be so easily induced to subscribe to the enthralment of their country, and submit to that levelling system to which all centralization of absolute power displays more or less an open tendency.

The spirit of resistance had passed from a riotous multitude to an emulous nobility. The age of insurrections was followed by the age of conspiracies.

Already, in 1412, Gian Maria, the eldest son of Gian Galeazzo Visconti, guilty of the most revolting atrocities, had perished at Milan by the hand of noble conspirators. Filippo Maria, his brother, owed his safety merely to his pusillanimity, by which he shut himself up, during his whole reign, a prisoner in his palace. Francesco Sforza, his illegitimate successor, disarmed his enemies by his brilliant valour, no less than by his frank and generous confidence. But his son, Galeazzo, who rivalled and surpassed the worst of his predeccessors in deeds of cruelty and libertinism, fell a victim to the just

indignation of three generous Milanese youths belonging to those noble families that had offered the warmest resistance to his father's usurpations. In the midst of his guard, on the threshold of a church, surrounded by a trembling multitude, the dagger of patriotic resentment found its way to the tyrant's best blood. Two of those noble assassins were struck down by the side of the murdered duke. Olgiati, the bravest of the three, threw himself among the crowd, calling the Milanese to arms and liberty; but was soon overtaken, and atoned for his offence by the most excruciating martyrdom. He proved, by his rare constancy in death, by what noble feelings he and his associates were actuated.

Never was a people called to liberty by more disinterested enthusiasts. But the people looked on and stood silent.*

Frequent disturbances threatened, in the meanwhile, the gradual progress of the house of Medici at Florence. Bernardo Nardi, one of the many exiles who filled Italy with the grievances they endured from the crushing ascendency of that fortunate family, resolved on a rash and hopeless attack of the petty town of Prato, where, with all the impatience and sanguineness of an exile, he hoped that the

* Conspiracy of Olgiati, Visconti, and Lampugnani, A.D. 1476.

Florentines only awaited a signal,—needed only to hear the rustling of an insurrectionary standard, to rise in open rebellion.

The headsman of Lorenzo de Medici soon cured him of his illusion.*

Eight years after the doleful tragedy of Prato, the Pazzi, a noble, numerous, and powerful family, seconded by the most conspicuous houses of the Florentine aristocracy, entered into an awful conspiracy against the life of Lorenzo and Julian. Pope Sixtus IV., a violent and sanguinary despot, and Ferdinand, a natural son of Alphonso the Magnanimous, and his successor to the throne of Naples, both of them harassed in their own states by frequent conspiracies—were privy to this murderous complot: an archbishop, Salviati, and two priests, engaged in the most active part of its execution.

The place chosen for the perpetration of the deed, was a church — the time, the awful moment of the elevation of the host.

Julian fell pierced by nineteen wounds on the steps of the altar, but Lorenzo extricated himself from the hands of the assassins; his partisans rallied round him,—and the dispersed conspirators, to the number of four hundred, paid with their lives the forfeit of their ill-

* A. D. 1470.

digested attempt. The seas and the mountains afforded no shelter against the vengeance of Medici.

The failure of repeated conspiracies at Rome and Naples had led to analogous results—to cement the power against which their efforts were aimed.

Since the reign of Boniface VIII., in the age of Dante, the temporal power of the popes had been, for two centuries, shaken to its foundation. The removal of the papal seat to Avignon, and subsequently, the endless disputes of the great western schism, had rendered the presence of the pope at Rome, a very rare occurrence. The varying feuds of the Roman nobility, and the continual devastations of foreign and national soldiery, had, for all that long interval, spread desolation and anarchy in the states of the church. The papal supremacy had long ceased to be recognised even in words; and the liberal municipal institutions which Rome and the principal cities had always preserved under the patronage of their pontiffs, were trampled down by the violence of factions, and utterly obliterated.

Long after the close of the great western schism, Nicolas V., a man of haughty and imperious temper, re-established his residence, and re-constituted the papal authority in its ab-

solute supremacy at Rome.* But the memory of their popular liberties still lingered in more than one Roman breast. Stefano Porcari, a noble citizen, dared to raise a voice for the revival of the ancient rights of the Roman people. He engaged in unsuccessful insurrections and conspiracies, which ended at length in his own destruction, and in that of his numerous accomplices.†

In the midst of a trembling population was the papal power thus definitively settled in the capital by a deed of bloodshed.

The unswerving ambition and animosity of the fierce Sixtus IV.; the unscrupulous perfidiousness of the profligate Alexander VI.; and the warlike ambition of the haughty Julius II., brought about the final dispersion of the proudest Roman barons, and the extinction of the petty tyrants of Romagna, and put an end to all pretensions of foreign powers to the territories of the church.

Thus of the great number of independent states that had been flourishing ever since the earliest dawn of Italian liberty, five large and almost equally-balanced divisions remained towards the end of the fifteenth century: Milan, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples. The lords of Mantua and Ferrara, the Dukes of Savoy,

* A. D. 1447. † A. D. 1453.

and the republics of Lucca and Siena, followed the destinies of their more powerful neighbours.

Had any of these five principal powers possessed sufficient strength and activity to draw all the others after its political views; or had they, with mutual understanding, joined in a common alliance against common dangers, Italy, deprived as it was of all public spirit, of all national cohesive vitality, might still offer a generous resistance against the ultra-montane nations that were about to renew, in that country, all the horrors of the Vandalic invasions. But their mutual suspicions and jealousies, the narrow-minded views of a cowardly policy, involved these potentates in a maze of diplomatic intrigues, in which, under pretext of maintaining a just equilibrium between them, they conspired against each other's tranquillity, until one of them, seized by a sudden panic, had recourse to the fatal measure of calling in a foreign auxiliary.

While thus Italy, divided, disarmed, enslaved, lay at the mercy of her tyrants, all around the circle of the Alps, from the north, from the east and west, nations, which had hitherto either hardly been known by name, or distracted by factions and wars, appeared, now suddenly reorganised, to become gigantic, and all at once, by a fatal providence, joined in her ruin.

The Swiss, whose very name was as yet utterly new in Italy, elated by their exploits at Granson and Morat, began to look down from their Alpine regions, and covet the sunny lands of Lombardy, that lay in all their tempting luxuriancy at their feet. Complying with the imprudent request of Pope Sixtus IV., the rude mountaineers of the canton of Uri had already entered the territory of Milan, and engaged in a skirmish against the ducal troops at Giornico, which had proved fatal to the Italian arms.*

The German empire had been restored to a better state of order and union under the house of Austria; and Maximilian, who had, by his marriage with Mary of Burgundy, laid the foundation of the greatness of his more fortunate successor, Charles V., was ready to urge his pretensions upon Italy, grounded on rights of imperial supremacy, which his predecessors had foregone ever since the age of Frederic II.

Charles VII. of France had, through the almost miraculous intervention of a virgin heroine, reconquered from the English his fairest provinces. Louis XI. had since humbled and chastised the arrogance of his rebellious vassals, added Provence and Flanders to the French crown, and fixed the confines of his

* A.D. 1479.

monarchy nearly to their present extent. England rested herself from a hundred years of continental wars, and from her long civil dissensions under the despotic sway of the house of Tudor. France, secure from that quarter, had leisure to come forward to the vindication of her claims on the kingdom of Naples and the duchy of Milan; and the youthful ambition of Charles VIII. was already irremovably bent on schemes of conquest.

The crowns of Arragon, Castile, and Sicily, had been united by the marriage of Ferdinand and Isabella,* and their combined efforts had driven from the peninsula the Moors of Grenada;† a bastard branch of the house of Arragon already reigned at Naples; and the pretext of affinity was soon to give the Spanish monarchs a right to interfere in the affairs of that kingdom.

Finally, the Turks, led by a succession of heroes, having accomplished the final overthrow of the Eastern empire, under Mahomet II., had established themselves on the banks of the Bosphorus;‡ and their victorious fleets had spread a sudden consternation all along the Mediterranean coasts. Already the crescent had been seen ominously gleaming on the

* A. D. 1469. † A. D. 1492. ‡ A. D. 1453

Italian lands as far as Aquileia;* while, in the south, the lieutenants of Mahomet II. had surprised and stormed the sea-port of Otranto.†

The building-up of all the other nations of Europe was the undoing of Italy.

The times being thus too fatally favourable to the consummation of our ultimate ruin, Ludovico Sforza, called *Il Moro*, sent an invitation to Charles VIII. of France to cross the Alps to the conquest of Naples.

After the assassination of Galeazzo Sforza in 1476, Gian Galeazzo his son, a child of eight years of age, peaceably succeeded to his father in the dukedom, under the regency of Bona of Savoy, his mother. But the uncles of the young duke, especially Ludovic the Moor, taking advantage of the imbecility of the minor, and of the helplessness of the regent, wrested from their hands the sceptre of Milan, and, under the specious pretext of paternal tutorage, kept his languishing nephew in close confinement. Ferdinand of Naples, who had married a Neapolitan princess to the much-wronged young duke, threatened to interfere in his favour, and march his forces against the unnatural usurper. Ludovic saw his danger, and thought of averting it by conjuring up the

* A. D. 1478. † A. D. 1480.

storm that was to involve his own in the fate of his country.

Charles VIII. of France, a young and sickly, but vain and presumptuous monarch, with a mind surfeited with all the inanities of chivalrous legends, resolved on rivalling the exploits of Charlemagne and St. Louis,—looked upon Naples only as a starting point, whence he intended to sail for his conquest of Palestine. The time had come to bring forward his titles to the crown of Naples as a successor of the house of Anjou. Ludovic the Moor had heated his youthful fancy by representing to him the facility of that conquest.

Nowhere, in fact, could the French army meet with any serious resistance.

Savoy and Montferrat, the great guardians of the Alps, were at that time governed by women. The republic of Genoa, subjected to the Dukes of Milan ever since the times of the Archbishop John Visconti, opened all its fortresses to the invading enemy. The republic of Venice, anxious about its eastern possessions, seemed bent on keeping its neutrality, and induced the Lords of Ferrara and Mantua to enter into its views. Lorenzo de Medici had died at the head of an acquiescent republic in 1492; and his son Piero, by coveting rather the appearance than the reality of power, had aban-

doned the line of policy of his predecessors, and undermined a supremacy that was based merely on popular partiality. With a cowardice and precipitation that cost him his expulsion from Florence, he gave up to the French the strongholds of the Appennines.

Pope Alexander, wholly intent on the aggrandizement of his son Cæsar Borgia, was but a faithless and powerless supporter of his threatened ally.

King Ferdinand of Naples had broken the charm that had attached the Neapolitans to his father, Alphonso the Magnanimous. His long reign had been spent in ineffectual struggles to quench the ever-springing conspiracies of his disaffected barons. The fate of Niccolò Piccinino, one of the greatest condottieri, whom he had put to death by an unheard-of perfidy, had alienated from Naples all the soldiers of adventure on whom that court might still rely for a steady defence. The kingdom was discordant and exhausted; numerous Neapolitan exiles followed the standards of France; frequent seditions broke out in the capital on the very eve of the French passing the frontier. Meanwhile, Ferdinand had died early in the year 1494. Alphonso II., his son, and Ferdinand II., his grandson, were panic-struck at the approach of the enemy. They deserted their

posts, one after another, with unaccountable precipitation.

Naples was lost—nor was a sword unsheathed, or a lance broken in its defence. Thus had Italian independence irretrievably perished.*

The French were indeed driven out of the country in as great a hurry as they had been imprudently let in. The ever-restless anxiety of Ludovic the Moor, the wary though temporizing policy of the Venetian senate, the jealousy of Spain and Germany, armed the league of Venice to the destruction of France. Charles VIII. retraced his way hastily and confusedly towards the north. Italy started up new enemies at every step on the path of the fugitive. Arrested on the banks of the Taro by the army of the Milanese and Venetian allies, commanded by the Marquis of Mantua, the French fought with the courage of despair. The battle of Fornovo was the first, since the time of the Lombard league, where the Italians found themselves in the presence of a foreign foe, and they never since, as a nation, reappeared on the field. Charles made good his escape; a twelvemonth after that conquest, there was not a Frenchman left in the country they had so readily overpowered.†

But the cataract had been broken open, and the inundation could no longer be checked.

* Feb. 1495. † Battle of Fornovo, July 6, 1495.

The charm of the invincibility of the Italian military school had vanished, and Italy appeared in all her unwarlike nudity. The delights of her soil and climate, the luxuries of her wealthy communities, the riches of her temples and palaces, had been revealed to the eager eye of her wondering neighbours,—they all raved with impatience to secure their share in the prey.

The short-sighted and selfish policy of her pusillanimous government was confounded by the novelty and gravity of the event. As it happens but too often among the victims of a sudden disaster, they provided for their own safety by the sacrifice of their natural allies, They sat silent and passive on the downfal of their brothers, unaware that every hour hastened the maturity of their own. Nay, more! They sued for the aid of a foreign sword to bring down their rivals, nor saw that that sword had two edges, and struck blindly and mercilessly against friend and foe.

The storm now gathered around the head of the first promoter of that national calamity.

Nothing daunted by the reverses of his predecessor, Louis XII. led the French to the conquest of Milan, which his vanguard was alone sufficient to achieve.* Ludovic the

* A. D. 1499.

Moor, abandoned and betrayed by his Swiss mercenaries at Novara, fell into the hands of his enemies, and died, after a long captivity in France.

Meanwhile the monarchs of Spain and France agreed on the partition of the kingdom of Naples, to the exclusion of their ally and its legitimate heir, Don Frederic, the last prince of the Arragonese house of Naples, who also died a captive in France. But that unnatural compact between two emulous nations could not last long. Hostilities broke forth between France and Spain, and Gonzalvo of Cordova secured for his master the entire possession of the realm.*

Next came the turn of Venice.

A compact had already been entered into between Louis XII. and Maximilian of Austria, for the partition of the Venetian *terra firma*, since the year 1504. But the ambition of the warlike Pope Julius II. raised up new enemies against Venice, and nearly all the powers of Europe signed the League of Cambray.† The Republic, all alone, menaced by so powerful a coalition, showed itself worthy of her ancient renown. Her troops fought the French gloriously, yet disastrously, at Agnadello:‡ they

* 1503. † League of Cambray, 1509.
‡ Battle of Agnadello, May 14, 1509.

drove from Padua, Maximilian of Austria, and his host of one hundred thousand combatants. Their magnanimous defence reconciled the goodwill of the French monarch and the proud heart of Julius II., and Venice was allowed to come out safe and sound from that unequal contest. But her vital strength was gone; her influence as a continental power was lost for ever; and limiting herself to a passive, defenceless policy at home, she prepared herself for that long and noble struggle which awaited her in the East.

The League of Cambray was followed by the Holy League.

Julius II. called on the Italian states to join him in his generous but illusory scheme of driving the barbarians out of Italy. The lieutenants of Louis XII., attacked by the Swiss, Spanish, and Italian confederates, notwithstanding their high-purchased victory of Ravenna, were ultimately compelled to evacuate the country.*

But the struggle was soon renewed at the accession of the two formidable rivals, Francis I. and Charles V. From the battle of Marignano† to the rout of Pavia,‡ the plains of Lombardy

* Battle of Ravenna, death of Gaston de Foix, April 11, 1512.

† Rout of the Swiss at Marignano, September 13, 1515.

‡ Battle of Pavia, capture of Francis I. February 24, 1525.

were turned into a vast battle-field, until the captivity of Francis I. laid the whole country at the discretion of his fortunate antagonist.

Only two years afterwards, a band of Spanish and German robbers, led by a renegade traitor, stormed and ravaged Rome in the name of Charles V. From that day the haughty pontiffs of Rome were made aware that, like the rest of Italy, their very existence was at the mercy of foreigners. There was one more short struggle at Florence, and then all was submission and silence.

The downfal of Italy was embittered by the virulent accusations of her foreign dominators, who loudly proclaimed that that nation only met with the fate that its cowardice and perfidy fully deserved.

Woe to the conquered!

The subjugation of a country, whose different states never, but on one fortuitous occasion, fought under the same banner, accomplished by the combined attacks of three colossal powers, was attributed to the unwarlike and pusillanimous disposition of its inhabitants. In vain did the last remains of Italian militia lavishly bleed at Agnadello, at Padua, at Ravenna, and on the Garigliano. In vain did Hector Fieramosca and his twelve followers chastise the taunting arrogance of an equal number

of French men-at-arms in the private encounter at Barletta.* The ugly stain of cowardice was indelibly inflicted on the Italian name, nor ever since that day has it ceased to brand our national character.

The arts of cunning and perfidy, and the double dealings and falsehoods with which foreigners so bitterly reproached the Italian princes in the fifteenth century, might, perhaps, have been excusable on the part of weak and defenceless governments brought all at once into an unequal contest with widely superior forces. But when we see the lion stooping to the wiles of the fox; when we see Spain and France coolly parting between them the states of their confiding Neapolitan ally; and again France and Germany conspiring to the extinction of inoffensive Venice; and the honest Swiss, not only basely deserting, but even delivering the fugitive Ludovic the Moor into the hands of relentless foes; and the French aiding the Pisans to shake off their yoke, only to sell them back again to the Florentines whenever it suited their interests:—when we read of so many treaties and alliances shamelessly broken, of so many flagrant defections, complots, and treacheries, we must confess

* Combat of thirteen Italian against as many French warriors at Barletta, A.D. 1503.

that French, Germans, and Spaniards, were but too soon initiated in that crooked policy of which they so loudly complained, whilst they could not even allege a state of weakness and helplessness as an extenuation of their duplicity. But perfidy and duplicity remained among the characteristic traits of the Italian nature; and foreigners, in general, make it a duty to look upon every person they meet, on their way through our country, as a professor of the unprincipled doctrines of Cæsar Borgia or Machiavello.

The deeds of sanguinary execution by which the conquest of Italy was accomplished or secured, were utterly new and unexampled in the annals of the country, even among the darkest records of the barbaric invasions. The French, never shrinking from any open violation of the rights of nations, surprised and stormed Capua, while a parley was going on, butchered seven thousand unarmed citizens in the streets, and committed every brutal outrage on their defenceless wives and daughters.* Louis XII., after granting a honourable capitulation to Genoa, sent the doge and the principal citizens to the scaffold, thus punishing their heroic devotion to the cause of their country.† The same monarch, irritated by

* 1506. † 1507.

the delay occasioned by the manly resistance of the towns of Peschiera and Caravaggio, hung their commanders on the battlements of their citadels, and put to the sword their surrendering garrisons.* A French officer beset with fire the mouth of a cavern, wherein the women and children of Vicenza had taken refuge, during the wars of the League of Cambray, and nearly six thousand of these innocent victims perished among the cruel agonies of suffocation.†

Such were the exploits of a king and a nation who boasted of having signalized their age by the revival of chivalry. The morals of the country were shocked by the constant perpetration of such nefarious outrages. The hunted-down population had scarcely any resource left but the dagger and poison. Yet even the arts of assassination and treason were brought into Italy, or, at least, carried into perfection, by foreigners, if at least we are to believe that Rodrigo Borgia, Pope Alexander VI., was a Spaniard, and the Constable of Bourbon a Frenchman. But as a ferocious and sanguinary propensity is always found combined with dastardly timidity, no nation has ever been impeached with more wanton cruelty and bloody-mindedness than the Italians. The poniard is said to be essentially a national weapon, from

* 1509. † 1510.

their proudest noble to the bandit of the Appennines; and ever since the death of the Dauphin of Francis I., not a poisoned cup has been administered without an Italian being in some manner or other suspected to be privy to the deed.

The free and easy manners of republican Italy were superseded by the gorgeous style, and the gross adulation of foreign courtiers. The very language of Dante was diluted into the empty phrases of a pompous grandiloquence; and the awkward mode of addressing the third person was imported from Spain, and naturalized into the Italian *lei*, a mode of speech, till the sixteenth century, unknown in Italy. Still, the Italians are pretended to be the inventors of every kind of servility of language; and their cringing, coaxing, fawning manners are a theme of the constant reproach of their European brothers, who think they have reason to argue from it the unfairness and meanness, the emasculation and degeneracy of their national character.

Woe to the conquered!

The lustre of their Italian name faded with the loss of its independent existence. The vices and crimes, which were either engrafted on them by their foreign invaders, or were only the consequence of oppression and vassalage,

were laid to the charge of the fallen race, and became their characteristical distinction.

From that general wreck of Italian nationality, only two of the principal ancient states still preserved a precarious and, to a great extent, nominal independence — Venice and Genoa; and four new, or newly-aggrandized states, arose to an ephemeral and tinsel lustre —Savoy, Ferrara, Tuscany, and Rome. These were all destined to dispute against each other the prominence on the stage of Italian politics, always under the shade of the influence of some of the great potentates who exercised, by turns, a paramount authority over the country. We shall have occasion to witness their prosperity, and gradual decline, during the period of Italian principalities, which we next propose to examine. Meanwhile, it remains for us to show, in a few words, the situation in which each of those states found itself at the close of the glorious epoch which we have hitherto traced down to its expiration—the epoch of Italian liberty and independence.

Since the deadly experiment of the war of Chiozza* had given the Republic of Venice a wide superiority over Genoa; and the continental wars, by which that state overcame Francesco da Carrara, lord of Padua, Vicenza,

* 1378—1381.

and Verona,* and conquered Brescia and Bergamo from the Dukes of Milan,† had secured it the possession of a vast territory in *terra firma*, Venice, elated by success, anticipated the moment in which she might assert her supreme influence, if not her absolute sovereignty, over all Italy. With a disinterestedness of patriotic feelings, which aristocracy alone is wont to foster and strengthen, the Venetian nobles not only lavished their blood and fortunes to the promotion of their national glory, but even voluntarily renounced the privileges of their rank, and the inalienable rights of men, submitting to a violent, arbitrary, iron rule, that their government, relying on absolute unanimity and security at home, might boldly and freely pursue its conquests abroad.

The warlike Francesco Foscari, invested with the supreme dignity of the state, beheld with more than Spartan firmness the repeated tortures that the dark Council of Ten inflicted on his ill-fated son. A year after his son's demise, the doge himself had become obnoxious to that suspicious tribunal, to which the chief magistrate of the republic was no less subjected than the meanest of citizens. Without uttering one word of murmuring or complaint, the nonagenarian hero deposed a sceptre, which he had

* 1404, 1405. † 1427—1430.

wielded with so much honour for thirty-four years, and died broken-hearted, as it were, on the steps of his throne, as the peals of the bells of St. Mark announced the inauguration of his successor.*

Antonio Grimani, who was cast into irons on his return from an unsuccessful expedition in the Levant,† forgetting his country's injustice in the hour of danger, with a magnanimity of which Victor Pisani had, a century before, given such a signal example, passed from his dungeon to the command of the Venetian forces, and restored, by his presence, the fortune and confidence of the Republic.

Andrea Gritti, one of the most conspicuous Venetian generals, had given such high testimonials of a rare heroism in many encounters by sea, and by land at the battle of Agnadello, as to command the respect and admiration of his French and Ottoman enemies. A prisoner at Constantinople in 1503, and in France in 1513, he knew how to turn those friendly feelings to the advantage of his country; and from the loneliness of his captivity he was enabled to negotiate a peace with Bajazet II. and Lewis XII., on such terms as Venice could hardly have dared to anticipate.

Such was the spirit of true greatness by

* 1457. † 1499.

which the lion of St. Mark was still animated; by such traits of republican virtue it sustained itself during the long struggle against the Turks from 1463 to 1503; and against the French, during the Cambray and Holy Leagues, from 1508 to 1516.

But it lay now weary, exhausted, and bleeding. The wounds which it had scarcely felt during the heat of that action, now burst open afresh, and it was made to feel, in its full extent, the utter exhaustion of its forces. Still there was life around its heart; and during the whole course of the sixteenth century we shall see it renewing its frequent struggles against its Mussulman antagonists, and making the last stand in Italy in favour of freedom of thought.

The reverses of the wars of the Bosphorus and of Chiozza, by which Genoa was ultimately compelled to give up the empire of the eastern seas to her ancient foe, and the endless anarchy of her fiery nobility, had induced the Genoese people to implore the protection of the house of Visconti.

After the death of John Visconti, archbishop of Milan, Genoa had thrown off the yoke, and asserted her independence. The sanguinary feuds, however, of two emulous families, the Fregosi and Adorni,* soon made the Genoese

* 1382—1386.

feel the necessity of a foreign arbiter and pacificator. They offered the supreme dominion of their city to Charles VI. of France, hoping that the rule of a distant and feeble monarch would bring them to order and peace without encroaching upon their popular liberties. Gian Galeazzo Visconti, who towards the year 1400 had succeeded in extending his sway over all Lombardy, recovered the rights of his family over Genoa, and the city continued to receive its first magistrates from his sons, Gian Maria and Filippo Maria, without, however, allowing their liege sovereigns to interfere in their internal or external policy.

The republic of Genoa espoused the cause of the house of Anjou against Alphonso the Magnanimous, and humbled the pride of its ancient rivals, the Catalonians and Arragonese, in a naval conflict at Ponza, where Alphonso himself was taken prisoner, and conveyed in triumph to Genoa and Milan.* Filippo Maria Visconti, moved either by an unwonted feeling of generosity, or by political views, set the captive monarch, unransomed, at liberty. The Genoese, who very justly considered Alphonso as their own prisoner, indignant at this arbitrary act, rose in rebellion, and refused their allegiance to a sovereign who had no power to enforce it.

* 1439.

But Genoa was neither yet thoroughly schooled to servitude, nor fit for a peaceful enjoyment of freedom. The people could find no rest from the ravages of contending parties, but by recurring to a remedy worse than the worst of evils,—foreign interference.

They again placed their Republic under the protection of the French crown in 1458, and were governed by the princes of the house of Anjou, until, wearied with their yoke, in 1461, they revolted against their self-imposed rulers, and destroyed a French army that was sent to recall them to obedience.

Three years later they renounced their high-purchased independence, captivated by the fame of the valour and magnanimity of Francesco Sforza, and voluntarily returned to their allegiance to Milan. The revolting brutality of his son, Galeazzo, soon gave them reason to repent their hasty submission. A conspiracy was entered into by many of the Genoese patricians,* directed by Girolamo Gentile, whose object it was to rouse the populace to massacre the Milanese authorities. The attempt proved unsuccessful, and many of the conspirators were immolated to the tyrant's revenge. But Galeazzo Sforza fell at last under the daggers of his assassins, and Genoa was not slow in providing for its emancipation.

* 1476.

At the epoch of the descents of Charles VIII. and Louis XII., Genoa followed the fortunes of Ludovic the Moor, and was involved in that usurper's fall. The French lieutenants of Louis XII., unable to appreciate the importance of popular rights, did not hesitate to trample down those municipal institutions which the Milanese despots had always respected. Genoa was subjected to a military rule, and harassed by the most violent extortions, until the exasperated population rose into an unanimous revolt, and drove out the French.* Louis XII. was obliged to march his whole army against the refractory city, and delivered it up to the most appalling military execution.

Since that time, the republic of Genoa, willing or unwilling, followed the fortunes of France.

It suffered severely during the frequent reverses of the French armies in Italy. It was ravaged for many days with incredible fury by the Spaniards, who took it by surprise in 1522.

The Genoese navy, commanded by Andrea Doria, was the best support of the French power at sea. Filippino Doria, his nephew, obtained, in the name of France, a signal victory over the imperial forces, in the Gulph

* 1507.

of Salerno,* whilst the French armies were giving way before a continuation of every calamity on shore.

While these Genoese heroes were lavishing their blood for the service of France, the rule of that government weighed harder and harder on their unfortunate country. Andrea Doria demanded no other reward for his services than the restoration of his native Republic. His just claims were disregarded by France. He passed over to Austria. He led his victorious galleys to Genoa: his presence alone was sufficient to rouse his countrymen to revolt. He proclaimed the independence of the Republic in the name of Charles V. In the name of that emperor, whose fatal prosperity had given the death-blow to all that remained of Italian freedom, Doria asserted the restored liberty of Genoa.†

With a blind partiality for the proud city on which all his patriotic feelings were concentered, the Genoese admiral followed, with a rare fidelity, the standards of the destroyer of Italy. During his long contest against Francis I., and in his expeditions to Algiers and Tunis, Doria was the right arm of Charles V. For his co-operation against France, Rome, Venice, and Turkey; for his steady compliance with all

* 1528. † 1529.

the measures that matured the fate of Italy, he only asked the faculty of disposing, at his pleasure, of what he considered to be his country.

Genoa was indisputably his.

Had his ambition wanted the absolute sovereignty of that state, he was sure of the approbation and support of his master, and of the ready acquiescence of his countrymen.

He preferred to restore to Genoa its republican franchises.

He reorganised the state under the form of a temperate aristocracy, under that government which appeared to him, and which was, perhaps, in that age and country, the most secure and plausible. Towards the close of his career, Doria, "the Genoese Washington," retired from public life, and resumed the habits of a private citizen. Genoa enjoyed a long and profound peace, of which the conspiracy of Fiesco* had scarcely power to ruffle the surface.

But the commerce of Genoa had long since suffered the severest losses. What had been left to the Genoese of their possessions in the Levant by their Venetian and Catalonian rivals, was utterly destroyed by the Turks. Their colonies at Pera and Caffa were put to the sword by Mahomet II., and his successors;†

* 1547. † 1453—1475.

and even their last possession of Corsica began to be warmly disputed, by the frequent insurrections of those fierce islanders, led by the high-minded Sampiero.

Since the expulsion of the sons of Lorenzo de Medici, at the epoch of the invasion of Charles VIII., Florence was distracted by religious and political factions.

Chance had sent to that city a Dominican monk of Ferrara, that Girolamo Savonarola, lawgiver and reformer, about whom, whether he was a self-deceiving enthusiast or a designing impostor, the world will not soon agree.

Previous to the death of Lorenzo de Medici, (some pretend under his auspices,) he had commenced his eccentric mission, and had stood unrelenting at the deathbed of that accomplished "Florentine Pericles," who, in the misgivings of his last hour, sued in vain for the haughty friar's benediction. As soon as Florence had rid herself of Piero de Medici and his brothers, the party of Savonarola obtained a wide ascendency over the multitude; and proclaiming Jesus Christ king of Florence, established a theo-democratic government, before which the semi-pagan, libertine association of courtiers, poets, and scholars, that used to crowd the halls of the house of Medici, were forced to bend in humiliation and terror. The fanatical

pulpit demagogue, who has been by many writers called the precursor of Luther, availing himself of the general anxiety created in Italy by the descent of the French—an event which he took upon himself the merit of having predicted—preached and enforced an universal reform. A reaction in favour of the exiled family, attempted by some of their favourers in 1497, was punished with death. The easy, and not unfrequently profligate life of many of the young aristocracy was visited with the severest censure. A bonfire was made in the public square of what were called profane books and paintings, with irreparable detriment to letters and arts.

Finally, Savonarola directed his attacks against the source itself of all corruption—the court of Rome.

Pope Alexander VI., seeing the inefficiency of spiritual weapons, set against him the Augustinians, an order of monks inimical to the Dominicans. The champions of the two orders had a long war of words from their pulpits. Their partisans lighted a pile in the square of Florence, to test the veracity of their tenets, and the firmness of their courage. The unsatisfactory result of that tremendous ordeal proved fatal to the credit of Savonarola: he was given up by his adherents, and consigned to the flames.*

* Arrival of Savonarola at Florence, 1489. Trial by fire

The Republic was organised under a milder and wiser rule by the Gonfaloniere Piero Soderini, soon after the death of the Dominican friar.

It was about this epoch that the counsels of the Republic began to feel the influence of the sound and mighty intellect of Machiavello.*

This modest, virtuous, and moderate citizen, contented with humble and subordinate offices in a Republic where his illustrious ancestors had repeatedly filled the highest dignities, willingly allowed his superiors to avail themselves of his rare talents, and yielded to them the merit of the measures which he alone had the ability to suggest.

He was the first in Italy to feel the imprudence of committing the safety of the state to the defence of mercenary adventurers, and to recommend the institution of a national militia. which, no doubt, powerfully contributed to retard, and might perhaps have utterly averted, the last downfal of Florence, had it been fully and opportunely adopted.

proposed by Friar Mariano da Genazano, a Franciscan, and accepted by Domenico Buonvicino, a Dominican, April 17, 1498. Death of Savonarola, May 23, 1498.

* Machiavello, born May 3, 1469; appointed secretary, 1498; ambassador to the court of France, 1500; to Cæsar Borgia, 1502; to Pope Julius II., 1503; to France, 1504; to Julius II., 1506; to the Emperor Maximilian, 1507—1508; to France, 1510—1511; persecuted by the Medici, 1512.

His frequent embassies to the courts of Rome and France, and his long mission to Cæsar Borgia, gave him that frightful insight of human nature, and of those detestable arts of policy, of which he has been but too generally believed to be the discoverer and promoter in Europe. Machiavello, however, invented nothing;—with a mind perfectly dead to all enthusiasm, he took a calm, cold, and rather misanthropic survey of the human family, and described it as he saw it, with a placid though appalling fidelity—with an impartial though disheartening neutrality.

There was in Italy, in that age, among the cultivated classes, little political and no religious belief.

The perpetual vicissitudes of factions had taught the greatest number of men to blend their personal interests with their warmest patriotic feelings.

Machiavello, gifted with an essentially active mind, sought in public life rather employment than either power or fame, or much less honours and wealth. He was one of the most disinterested men that ever lived; and if he never perhaps loved any living being, neither did he certainly love himself; nor did he ever turn those powers for which he has been so much praised and abused, to raise himself in

the world. His delight was in sounding the depths of the human heart. He wished to appreciate men after their positive value; and from this dangerous knowledge he derived nothing for himself, but the melancholy advantage of being entitled to despise both the oppressor and the oppressed—the prince and his subjects.

He was as good as a man can be without love or belief.

Certainly, never were two epochs more diametrically opposed to each other than the age of Savonarola and the age of Machiavello; and yet this last made his entrance on the political stage just as the other made his melancholy exit.

The efforts of the Florentine republic, ever since it was delivered from the Medici, were pertinaciously turned to the conquest of Pisa, which had availed herself of the patronage of Charles VIII. to vindicate her independence. From 1499 to 1509, the Florentines carried on their unnatural hostilities. Every year, with a refined inveteracy, they laid waste the Pisan territory with a view to reduce the town by famine. The French and Spaniards, who profited by that brotherly enmity, by turns offered their alliance, and sent men and subsidies to the besieged. Finally, Florence, by the most tempting offers, purchased from France the right of enslaving the emulous city. A new

emigration and rapid depopulation ensued. Pisa sank under this last calamity to rise no more.

Meanwhile, Florence, scarcely less exhausted, awaited her just retribution. Their constant alliance with France had incensed the wrath of the irascible Julius II., who, after the battle of Ravenna, resolved to punish the Florentines by restoring the Medici into their city.

Of the three sons of Lorenzo de Medici, Piero, the eldest, had died in 1503, at the epoch of the disastrous retreat of the French at the Garigliano. Giovanni, the cardinal, (afterwards Leo X.,) and Julian, duke of Nemours, the two surviving brothers, marched at the rear-guard of a disorderly band of Spanish marauders that Julius sent to the conquest of Florence. On their first arrival they surprised and took Prato, and gave it up to the ravages of an unruly soldiery. The terror that the massacre of Prato struck among the defenders of Florence induced them to capitulate, and the Medici were restored to their native city after eighteen years of exile.*

The ancient adversaries of the family of Medici rallied. They entered into a conspiracy, which was soon detected, and which cost some of the most distinguished citizens their lives. Machiavello was apprehended among the num-

* A.D. 1512.

ber, and put to the torture. He stood the ordeal with his wonted calmness and constancy. No confession could be extorted from him, and perhaps he had nothing to confess; perhaps his guilt, as well as that of his accomplices, had no better foundation than the famous Catholic plot, in the days of Charles II., in England.

Leo X., at his accession,* proclaimed a general amnesty, and gave orders for the release of his prisoners.

After the exaltation of Leo, Julian, his youngest brother, ruled as his lieutenant at Florence till the year 1516. After the death of Julian, the pope placed at the head of the Republic, Lorenzo, duke of Urbino, son of his eldest brother, Piero. Lorenzo having also died, in 1519, Florence was governed by the Cardinal Giulio de Medici, a natural son of that Julian who perished in the Pazzi conspiracy. Cardinal Giulio was afterwards exalted to the papal chair,† under the name of Clement VII.

This weak, crafty, and unprincipled pontiff, who, by his alliance with the French, had called down upon himself the resentment of Charles V., and exposed the metropolis of Christendom to the awful ravages of the lawless followers of the Constable of Bourbon,‡ now, taking advantage

* A. D. 1513. † A. D. 1523.

‡ Storming of Rome by the armies of Charles V.; death of the Constable of Bourbon, their leader; dreadful pillage and devastation, which lasted nine months. May 6th, 1527.

of the peace of Cambray, which laid the whole country at the mercy of the Austrian conqueror, and providing for his own safety by the treaty of Barcelona, abandoned the French, his former allies—the power, splendour, and dignity of the church—the general interests of Italy—to conciliate the goodwill of the minion of fortune. At the moment of conferring upon Charles V., at Bologna, the golden crown of the Roman empire, and the iron crown of the Lombards,* Clement asked no favour in return but the conqueror's co-operation in bringing his native town to obedience.

The tidings of the storming of Rome by Bourbon's army had no sooner reached Florence, than the lovers of liberty had, without resistance, driven the lieutenants of Clement from their towns, and established their popular government. The antique virtues of republican Tuscany seemed at once revived for a final experiment. At the first dawning of this ephemeral liberty, the most active and influential citizens returned from the land of exile, or from their inglorious retreats.

Machiavello, who, under the Medici, had been condemned to neglect and inaction, though he evinced no repugnance to offer his services to his country, whatever might be the

* Charles V. crowned by the pope at Bologna, Feb. 22, and March 24, 1530.

ruling faction, opened now his heart to a hope that his talents might be of some avail to the Republic. But public feeling was against him. He was thought a lukewarm friend of the cause of his country, and looked upon with mistrust. His upright mind sank under this undeserved disgrace, and he was brought by chagrin to an immature end. The warmest defenders of Florence, too late made aware of their injustice, gathered around him. From a bed of sickness, the dying statesman and citizen, too great to give way to any feeling of personal resentment, raised his voice for his country, and his last words were of applause and encouragement to its restorers.*

Machiavello recommended, above all measures, the reorganization of the national militia, and exhorted his friends to proceed with concord and firmness.

The Florentines were firm and unanimous.

Never had that city displayed so much zeal or disinterested patriotism,—never brought forward such inexhaustible resources. The citizens were mustered up in several bands of hardy infantry, which rivalled each other in activity and vigilance. Men of letters, artists, and scholars, left their peaceful avocations to range themselves under the standard of the Republic.

* Death of Machiavello, June 22, 1522.

The gigantic mind of the greatest of ancient and modern artists, Michael Angelo, lent his powerful aid to the erection of bulwarks and batteries for the protection of his native walls He was charged with repeated missions to Ferrara, to study new models of fortification, and was even made one of the ten leaders of the military forces.

There was a moment, it is said, when, in a fit of spite or despondency, (we will never say, of fear,) he deserted his post, and took refuge at Ferrara and Venice. But this was long before the hour of danger pressed hard upon Florence. Ere the papal and imperial allies had laid siege to his native town, he sued for a reconciliation with the magistrates, and hastened back to take his share in the forthcoming events.

And now the Spanish and German bands invaded the vale of Arno, and laid waste the beautiful plain of Ripoli, pitching their tents under the very walls of Florence. Against the numberless hosts of her besiegers Florence had no friend in or out of Italy. Resistance, under such circumstances, was almost insanity, and yet Florence resisted.

Francesco Ferruccio, one of the leaders of the militia, a man of superior intelligence and rare intrepidity, still kept the field in the open

country, and, with undisciplined bands, performed such prodigies of valour as could hardly be expected from the best experienced veterans. He fell in at length with a large body of German cavalry at Gavignana, and, compelled to give battle under disadvantageous circumstances, he was cut to pieces, with nearly the whole of his band. (Aug. 2.)

Meanwhile, within the walls, famine, plague, and treason hastened the fatal day of Florence. A sullen determination, such as despair alone is apt to engender, had seized the rulers of the beleaguered city; they resolved never to yield to any extremity, and to bury themselves with their families amidst the ruins of their country. Malatesta Baglioni, one of the mercenary leaders whom the Republic held in its pay, understood nothing of that heroic resolution, and entered into secret negotiations with the besiegers, to avert the fate of those deluded enthusiasts, and save them in spite of themselves. He opened the gates to the enemy, and turned his artillery against the town. Florence surrendered after a siege of ten months, August 10th, 1530.

The vengeance of Clement weighed hard and mercilessly upon the conquered. All Italy and Europe were filled with the clamours of thousands of Florentine exiles. Alexander de

Medici, a bastard of that family for whom the pope obtained from Charles V. the title of Doge of Florence, was allowed to exercise, for six years, the most revolting tyranny.

After the death of Alexander, who fell a victim to a domestic tragedy, Cosmo, a descendant of Lorenzo, brother of the first Cosmo Padre della Patria, was raised to the throne by the intrigues of the friends of his family, among whom the most ardent and active was the historian Guicciardini.

Another and the last effort in favour of the liberty of Florence, was made by a large number of exiles, led by the representatives of the noble families of Salviati, Strozzi, and other inveterate enemies of the name of Medici. But they were routed at Montemurlo,* and their leaders lost their lives on the scaffold.

Filippo Strozzi, the principal hero of that ill-fated expedition, destroyed himself in his dungeon.

With the aid of a French army, Cosmo succeeded in adding Siena to his dominions,† and several years later he was decorated by Pius V. with the title of Grand Duke of Tuscany.‡

Lucca alone, of all the Tuscan republics, was suffered to continue under its narrow-minded and pusillanimous aristocracy, and lived in

* 1538. † 1534. ‡ 1569.

utter insignificance and obscurity down to the last castastrophe, which involved its fate in that of Venice and Genoa.

During the long reign of Charles V., the usurpations of all the Italian princes received their sanction from the imperial authority.

At the epoch of his coronation at Bologna, Charles V. invested Alphonso of Este with the duchies of Modena and Reggio, which he was to hold as fiefs of the empire. On the same occasion, Alphonso received also from the pope's hands the sovereignty of Ferrara, the ancient seat of his family, the possession of which had been so warmly disputed against him, especially by Julius II., who was bent on the utter extermination of his house.

The Duke of Savoy and the Marquis of Montferrat, who, from their mountainous districts, had extended their sway over the best part of the Piedmontese territory, and had taken an active part in the wars of Italy as the constant allies of France, now sued for the patronage of Austria, and made their obeisance at Bologna.

The marquisate of Mantua was likewise erected into a duchy, and restored to its ancient possessors, the Gonzaga. But the lustre of that family, as well as that of Montferrat, was soon destined to fade. These prin-

cipalities were left vacant in consequence of the extinction of the legitimate line, and soon became the subject of fresh contentions, that replunged Italy into those evils from which it had begun to recover.

Meanwhile, the loss of liberty and independence paralyzed the active and enterprising spirit that had, until that day, characterized the citizens of republican Italy. All the industry and ingenuity of the Lombard manufacturers were brought to an end by the cruelty and fanaticism, by that strange mixture of oppression and anarchy, that characterized the epoch of the Spanish dominion. The Milanese labourers emigrated by thousands to the neighbouring cantons of Switzerland; and the soil itself, of the richest plain in Europe, lay, for two centuries, uncultivated and sterile.

The buoyant and cheerful disposition of the Florentine merchants, underwent a gradual process of enervation and degeneracy under the cruel but crafty rule of the youngest branch of the Medici. The wealth and population of Florence decreased with a frightful rapidity; and Pisa, deprived of her port by the rivalry of Leghorn, did not even preserve the shadow of its former importance. The lowlands of Tuscany, as well as of the Roman campagna, and the Neapolitan coasts of the Adriatic,

were turned into unhealthy swamps. Ravenna, Brindisi, Barletta, and the best harbours in the south and east, were gradually filled up and deserted.

The evils of political proscription were followed by the ravages of religious persecution. The Spanish and Roman inquisition, notwithstanding the general resistance with which the Italians repeatedly rose against it, succeeded, at length, in silencing the voice of free opinion, and blasting the vital growth of science and literature.

Poetry, painting, and even music, seemed gradually to obey the influence of that general depression and languor. During the whole of the sixteenth, and a great part of the following century, from the age of Michael Angelo and Leonardo da Vinci to the close of Salvator Rosa's eccentric career, the fine arts underwent an imperceptible and yet irresistible decline.

Activity and brilliancy of mind, loftiness and magnanimity of soul, were still to be found in Italy; but what had formerly appeared to be the common inheritance of the whole of that gifted nation, became the rare and accidental privilege of individuals.

The Venetians and the Genoese alone, as a people, continued to give frequent and lumi-

nous proofs of a robust and tenacious vitality. What was in Florence and Ferrara the result of the efforts of ambitious and luxurious princes, was at Genoa and Venice effected by the unanimous exertion of popular energy. It took no less than two centuries to wrench from the privateers of those two maritime cities the sceptre of the seas, or to force their merchantmen to unlearn their way to the *Scales* of the Levant; nor could their final ruin have ever been accomplished without the important discoveries which gave to the Atlantic so decided an ascendency over the Mediterranean.

Of this great geographical revolution, the Italians have an undisputed right to claim the first glory. It was principally the daring spirit of Italian exiles and adventurers that brought beyond the Alps and beyond the sea that state of fermentation and disquietude that allowed them no peace in their country. They blended their ardour for trade and commercial enterprise with that love of danger, with that adventurous, devotional, extravagant spirit, that had hitherto been the sole mover of chivalrous enthusiasm.

Columbus was the last of knights.

Catterino Zeno, Barbaro, and Contarini, during their long and perilous missions, wandered far and wide over the Asiatic continent in the

same track that their venerable countryman, Marco Polo, had trod two centuries before. Their glowing descriptions of the golden regions of the east awakened the ambition and avarice of the European courts. Portuguese navigators especially, guided by a noble Venetian, Luigi Cadamosto, the first who published a report of those wonderful cruises, had already launched forth on their southern expeditions, when at last the Genoese hero laid open a much wider field of discovery by piloting four humble Spanish caravels to the new hemisphere. Soon the eargerness of nautical enterprise found the limits of the globe too narrow for its daring aspirations. The mariners of Venice and Genoa flocked to the ports of Palos, of Cadiz, and Lisbon, whence it seemed as if the most obscure pilot had only to steer westward of southward, where new stars would welcome his arrival, and the ocean would start up before him new islands and continents on which to cast his name, sure that that name would remain as long as those new islands and continents should tower over the main.

Of the numberless advantages that Europe was to derive from these maritime discoveries, Italy had only the glory. It was not, perhaps, without providential interposition, that Columbus could not prevail on his native state to

enter into his views. It was a tacit mark of acquiescence in the will of Heaven, by which Italy seemed to feel that her maritime race was run, and that nothing was left to her but to lead the way to the future greatness of her more fortunate neighbours.

The names of Columbus, Cadamosto, Amerigo, Verrazzano, John and Sebastian Cabot stand unrivalled among those of the earliest European navigators. Spain, France, England and Portugal, shared the rich spoils that the ocean had yielded to their genius and daring. Of the vast continent of the New World not an acre of ground fell to the lot of the Italians, not a lump of the ore of its inexhaustible mines —ay, thank God! nor a drop of the blood of its inoffensive inhabitants.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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